

Elia Samuele Artom

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«When, in 1938, I delivered my last lecture at this University, as a *libero docente* [lecturer with official certification to teach at the university] of Hebrew language and literature I would not have believed...»: in this way, Elia Samuele Artom opened the commemoration of his brother-in-law, Umberto Cassuto, on 28 May 1952 in Florence, where he was just passing through¹.

The change that so many lives, like his own, had to undergo as a result of anti-Jewish laws was radical. Artom embarked for Mandatory Palestine in September 1939, with his younger son Ruben. Upon arrival he found a land that was not simple, whose 'promise' – at the center of the sources of tradition so dear to him – proved to be far more elusive than certain rhetoric would lead one to believe.

His youth and studies

Elia Samuele Artom was born in Turin on 15 June 1887 to Emanuele Salvador (8 December 1840 – 17 June 1909), a post office worker from Asti, and Giuseppina Levi (27 August 1849 – 1 December 1924), a kindergarten teacher from Carmagnola². He immediately showed a unique aptitude for learning: after being privately educated,³ he obtained «the high school honors

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¹ Elia Samuele Artom, *Umberto Cassuto*, «La Rassegna mensile di Israel», 18, 1952, p. 451. I wish to thank Elena Lea Rossi Artom for the help and information about her family, which she kindly provided. Special thanks go to Patrizia Guarnieri for the invaluable suggestions that emerged in the revision process of this work.

² See the crucial historical-genealogical work by Elena Lea Rossi Artom, *Gli Artom. Storia di una famiglia della Comunità ebraica di Asti attraverso le sue generazioni (XVI-XX secolo)*, Turin, Zamorani, 1997, p. 196. Emanuele Salvador was the head of the «Regie Poste» [Royal post services] in Turin, while Giuseppina, who was also an inspector at the school G.A. Rayneri, ran the Jewish kindergarten.

³ Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People (hereinafter CAHJP), *Archivio della famiglia Artom*, P171, b. 23 «Documenti riguardanti la libera docenza 1927-1964», «Certificato dell'esame di proscioglimento dall'obbligo dell'istruzione elementare inferiore», Turin, 11 July 1894. Artom obtained his elementary school diploma from the public primary school G.A. Rayneri of Turin. He received an overall grade of 29/30.

diploma» in 1904; he graduated in literature «with full marks and honors» from the Facoltà di Filosofia e Lettere [School of Philosophy and Letters] of the Royal University of Turin, and earned a diploma from the Magistero [School of education]⁴. He had a marked interest in oriental studies, having taken courses in Hebrew, Arabic and Syriac, and in the Hebrew literary tradition in Greek, as evidenced by the title of his degree thesis dedicated to the first two books of the Maccabees⁵.

At the Royal Higher Institute of Vocational and Advanced Studies (later University) of Florence in the academic years 1908-09 and 1909-10, he took courses with, among others, Fausto Lasinio in Arabic and Comparative Semitic languages, Francesco Scerbo (1849-1927), and Hirsch Perez Chajes (1876-1927) in Hebrew. He obtained a scholarship from the Royal College Carlo Alberto to specialize in Hebrew. At the same time, under the guidance of Samuel Hirsch Margulies (1858-1922) and Chajes, he completed his rabbinical studies in the Italian Rabbinical College in Florence, receiving the title of Maskil in 1908, and the title of Chakham ha-Shalem in 1912⁶.

His teaching and rabbinic career

Artom immediately devoted himself to teaching, at first offering private lessons⁷. He taught Hebrew in the «Scuola popolare femminile» in Florence in 1912,⁸ and Hebrew, Italian, history and geography at the Jewish Technical

⁴ CAHJP, *Archivio della famiglia Artom*, P171, b. 23, «Notizie sull'operosità scientifica e la carriera didattica di Elia Samuele Artom», Alessandria, 20 April 1926, document sent as part of his application for *libera docenza*.

⁵ Ibid. Some chapters were published in «Rivista israelitica» between 1909 and 1912.

⁶ CAHJP, *Archivio della famiglia Artom*, P171, b. 23, «Notizie sull'operosità scientifica», cit.; CAHJP, *Archivio della famiglia Artom*, P171, b. 25 «Corrispondenza e documenti riguardanti l'*aliah* e la ricerca di lavoro in Erez Israel», short curriculum vitae, n.p., n.d. (in Hebrew); draft letter from E. S. Artom to the administration of the Hebrew Reali School in Haifa, n.p., 11 June 1940 (in Hebrew). See also the fact sheets on Elia S. Artom in Angelo M. Piattelli, *Repertorio biografico dei Rabbini d'Italia dal 1861 al 2015*, 2nd revised and updated ed. (1st ed. 2010), <<http://www.archivio-torah.it>> (accessed 31 August 2020) and in *Rabbini*, without typographical notes <<https://www.rabbini.it>> (accessed 31 August 2020).

⁷ CAHJP, *Archivio della famiglia Artom*, P171, b. 23, «Notizie sull'operosità scientifica», cit.

⁸ Ibid., b. 25, draft letter from E. S. Artom to the administration of the Hebrew Reali School in Haifa, n.p., 11 June 1940 (in Hebrew).

School of the charitable institution Colonna and Finzi in Turin in 1914. He subsequently became principal in the latter. In August 1915 he enlisted for voluntary service in the military as a rabbi in Belluno, but through the intervention of the aforementioned charitable institution⁹, he soon returned to Turin and his school assignments. He taught Greek at the private Institute Ricaldone of Turin in 1917-18, history at the Royal Lyceum Gioberti in 1918-19, and literary studies at the Royal Gymnasium D'Azeglio in 1919-20¹⁰. Artom had accompanied his teaching with intense writing activity publishing seventeen works over the span of ten years (1907-1917)¹¹.

In the meantime, he began to exercise rabbinical activity, holding the office of Assistant Rabbi in Ferrara (1913-1914) and in Turin (1914-1920)¹². On 11 August 1920, by decree of the Governor of Tripolitania, Artom was appointed Chief Rabbi of Tripoli (Libya), where he moved with his sons Devorà, Emanuele and David and with his wife Giulia Cassuto, sister of Umberto, who, at the time, was secretary of the Florentine Jewish community and assistant to the Chief Rabbi Samuel H. Margulies¹³. The stay of the Artom family in Libya was marred by the death of 7-year-old Devorà (1914-1922), who passed away at home on 14 May 1922, while her father was in the synagogue¹⁴.

In March of the same year, seized by a sudden illness in the synagogue, the Chief Rabbi of Florence died prematurely¹⁵. Just a month before, he had proposed to Artom, who had been his student at the Collegio, to replace

⁹ Ibid.; E. L. Rossi Artom, *Gli Artom*, cit., p. 203.

¹⁰ CAHJP, *Archivio della famiglia Artom*, P171, b. 23, «Notizie sull'operosità scientifica», cit., with the assessment, «lodevole» [commendable].

¹¹ Ibid., «Elenco dei documenti, titoli e pubblicazioni allegati da Elia Samuel Artom a corredo della domanda presentata per ottenere l'abilitazione alla libera docenza in Lingua e letteratura ebraica», Alessandria, 26 April 1926.

¹² Ibid., b. 25, draft letter from E. S. Artom to the administration of the Hebrew Reali School in Haifa, n.p., 11 June 1940 (in Hebrew).

¹³ Ibid., b. 23, «Notizie sull'operosità scientifica», cit.

¹⁴ E. L. Rossi Artom, *Gli Artom*, cit., p. 203.

¹⁵ For the complex affair of Margulies' succession to the Florentine professorship, of which only a few hints concerning Artom are offered here, see the excellent and detailed reconstruction by Lionella Viterbo, *Cronache dal passato fiorentino: la difficile successione del rabbino Margulies (1920-1926)*, «La Rassegna mensile di Israel» 60, 3, 1994, pp. 148-178 <<https://www.jstor.org>> (accessed 31 August 2020).

David Prato in the roles of *chazzan* (cantor in the temple), charity inspector and principal of the Jewish elementary school, and teacher of Hebrew in the Talmud Torah. Margulies' letter with that proposition reached Artom in Tripoli, together with the telegram about the death of his teacher, sent to him by his brother-in-law Umberto Cassuto. The tragic circumstance led Artom to accept the offer without delay to honor the last wishes of his teacher, «who [...] clearly showed me that he was very happy to see me coming there»¹⁶. Furthermore, his contract in Tripoli was about to expire, on 31 March, and the conditions for its renewal did not suit him, as he wrote to his brother-in-law¹⁷. In Florence, however, due to previous tensions between the deceased Chief Rabbi and a part of the Community Council, Artom's candidacy was not well received by everyone, and on 1 May 1922 he was released from any commitment towards the community¹⁸. He therefore stayed in Tripoli for another year, after which he «voluntarily resigned» from his post¹⁹. On his return to Italy he resumed teaching: in 1923-24 at the R[eale] Liceo Scientifico G. Ferraris in Turin, in 1924-25 at the R. Liceo classico Dante in Florence, in which city he also held courses in «post-Biblical Hebrew history and literature and Talmudic Aramaic grammar at the Italian Rabbinical College»²⁰.

As regards his pastoral activity, Artom held the rabbinical chair in Alessandria until 5 December 1926, when he was installed in the office of Chief Rabbi in Florence, which his brother-in-law Cassuto had held for a period. This put an end to the long and complex crisis connected with the succession of Rabbi

¹⁶ Archive of the Jewish Community in Florence (hereinafter ACEFI), letter from E. S. Artom to U. Cassuto, Tripoli, 16 March 1922, cited without complete reference in Lionella Viterbo, *Cronache dal passato fiorentino*, cit., pp. 174-175.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 154. Margulies was succeeded by Umberto Cassuto himself, who nevertheless soon resigned, on 30 October 1924, due to the unsatisfactory economic conditions of the contract. A few months later Cassuto was appointed professor of Hebrew language and literature at the University of Florence. On the story, see *ibid.*, pp. 155-159; Lionella Viterbo, *Umberto Cassuto da segretario della Comunità a Rabbino Capo di Firenze*, «La Rassegna mensile di Israel» 82, 2-3, 2016, pp. 91-106. See also Patrizia Guarnieri and Alberto Legnaioli, *Umberto (Moshe David) Cassuto*, in Ead., *Intellettuali in fuga dall'Italia fascista*, Firenze University Press, 2019, pp. 2-3 <<http://intellettualinfuga.fupress.com>> (accessed 31 August 2020).

¹⁹ CAHJP, *Archivio della famiglia Artom*, P171, b. 23, «Notizie sull'operosità scientifica», cit.

²⁰ Ibid.

Marguiles²¹.

Libera docenza

Having obtained his *libera docenza* in Hebrew language and literature²², with a decree signed by the minister Pietro Fedele, on 17 May 1927 he requested to teach at the Royal University of Florence²³, where in fact he held two courses for a total of two to three hours per week.²⁴ After five years, he was confirmed in this post by the ministerial decree of 19 February 1932²⁵. On behalf of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Directorate General for Italian Citizens Abroad), in October 1933 he embarked in Trieste to go to Palestine as an Italian teacher in Jewish middle schools, «in which, as is well known, the language of instruction is the Hebrew language»²⁶. Thus, he also temporarily left his post as spiritual guide of the Florentine community, making a «public

²¹ L. Viterbo, *Cronache dal passato fiorentino*, cit., pp. 162-164.

²² CAHJP, *Archivio della famiglia Artom*, P171, b. 23, «Notizie sull'operosità scientifica», cit.; «Elenco dei documenti, titoli», cit.

²³ Historical archive of the University of Florence (hereinafter ASUFI), *Fondo Liberi docenti*, b. 3, f. 60 «Artom Elia Samuele», decree of qualification for *libera docenza*, Rome, 29 January 1927; application for authorization to exercise *libera docenza* to the rector of the University of Florence, Florence, 17 May 1927.

²⁴ Ibid., decree of qualification for *libera docenza*, Rome, 29 January 1927 (a handwritten copy is held also in CAHJP, *Archivio della famiglia Artom*, P171, b. 23); «Programma per corso libero di Lingua e letteratura ebraica nella R. Università di Firenze. Anno accademico 1927-1928», Florence, 17 May 1927; program of the course in Hebrew language and literature for the academic year 1928-29, n.p., n.d., including the signatures of Artom and the dean of the School of Letters and Philosophy, Paolo E. Pavolini; program of the course in Hebrew language and literature for the academic year 1929-30, Florence, 8 November 1929.

²⁵ Ibid., letter from E. S. Artom to the dean of the School of Letters and Philosophy of the University of Florence, Rome, 30 June 1937.

²⁶ Ibid. The same clarification regarding the language is also in a subsequent curriculum vitae, CAHJP, *Archivio della famiglia Artom*, P171, b. 25, draft letter from E. S. Artom to the administration of the Hebrew Reali School in Haifa, n.p., 11 June 1940 (in Hebrew). Artom's deliberate emphasis on his command of spoken Hebrew, in addition to having a particular significance for a Zionist, would give him particular prestige in his homeland, and certainly reassured potential employers in Eretz Israel about his ability to perform the requested assignment. See also ibid., the letter from E. S. Artom to Yehuda Marshek, n.p., n.d. (in Hebrew), in which Artom asks the principal of the Tachkemoni School in Tel Aviv, the first and for a long time the only religious Zionist school in the country, «to kindly send me a certificate showing that in the year 1933/1934 I was a teacher of Italian at the Tachkemoni Technical School and that the language of instruction was the Hebrew language». The letter probably dates back to early June of 1940, since Artom wrote to Marshek on 10 June 1940 thanking him for sending the certificate. On the school see The Central Zionist Archives, «Tachkemoni» <<http://www.zionistarchives.org.il>> (accessed 31 August 2020).

confession of his rabbinical sins [...for] all that could have been done and was not done» in a speech that the weekly *Israel*, directed by Alfonso Pacifici (1899-1981), defined as «exceptional in tone and content»²⁷. Artom taught, among others, at the Tachkemoni school in Tel Aviv, laying the foundations for a network of contacts that proved invaluable in 1939, in far less happy circumstances²⁸. He had the opportunity to meet, among others, the mathematician Abraham H. Fränkel²⁹, future rector of the Hebrew University since 1938, and collaborated with Abraham Kahana (1874-1946) on the translation and commentary of the so-called apocryphal books of the Bible, editing the Prayer of Manasseh, the Epistle of Jeremiah and the Greek Apocalypse of Baruch³⁰.

Upon his return to Italy, Artom resumed his post as Chief Rabbi of the Florentine community, but no longer held the courses in Hebrew language and literature at the university, since he had been called to the Italian Rabbinical College, which had moved to Rome at the end of 1933³¹. He also left the rabbinical chair «for [he] could not continue to simultaneously attend

²⁷ *Discorso di congedo del Rabbino Capo*, «Israel», XIX, 2, 4 October 1933, p. 8.

²⁸ CAHJP, *Archivio della famiglia Artom*, P171, b. 25, draft letter from E. S. Artom to Abraham H. Fränkel, n.p., 23 October 1939 (in Hebrew). Artom repeatedly states that he taught in various schools during that time, but never gives their names, except for the Tachkemoni school in Tel Aviv.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, draft letter from E. S. Artom to Hiram Pflaum, n.p., 23 October 1939 (in Hebrew).

³⁰ ASUFi, *Fondo Liberi docenti*, b. 3, f. 60 «Artom Elia Samuele», letter from E. S. Artom to the dean of the School of Letters and Philosophy of the University of Florence, Rome, 30 June 1937. See Abraham Kahana (ed.), *Ha-sefarim ha-chitsonim* [The Apocrypha], 2 vols., Tel Aviv, Hotsa'at mekorot, 1936-1937. The texts edited by Artom are included in vol. 1, tome 2. Kahana, of Russian origin, migrated to Palestine in 1923, where he worked as a teacher and a librarian, dedicated to Biblical studies. In 1903 he undertook the publication of an edition of the Hebrew Bible with commentary. One of Artom's teachers from the Rabbinical college of Florence, Hirsch Perez Chajes, also collaborated on the project, which unfortunately remained unfinished. See Joseph E. Heller, *Kahana, Abraham*, in Fred Skolnik and Michael Berenbaum (eds.), *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd ed., vol. 11, Detroit, Macmillan Reference USA, Keter Publishing House, 2007, p. 710.

³¹ The resolution of the Council of the Union of the Italian Israelite Communities was on 13 September 1933, while the inauguration of the College's headquarters took place on 20 December. See Angelo M. Piattelli, *Angelo Sacerdoti: la Federazione rabbinica italiana e il Collegio rabbinico italiano*, «La Rassegna mensile di Israel» 79, 1-3, 2013, pp. 87-92, in particular p. 89, n52. Artom had been teaching there since 1927, when the College was still in Florence. See CAHJP, *Archivio della famiglia Artom*, P171, b. 25, draft letter from E. S. Artom to the administration of the Hebrew Reali School in Haifa, n.p., 11 June 1940 (in Hebrew); draft letter from E. S. Artom n. addressee, n.p., 8 August 1941 (in Hebrew).

to [his] office here and teaching in Rome». This news was released at the end of August 1935 but had been «already known for several months», as reported by *Israel*³². His decision was certainly influenced by the continuing disagreements with the community council.³³ Other disagreements, between Dante Lattes and the director of the Collegio, Angelo Sacerdoti, lurked behind the vacancy of the post that Artom had filled, eventually also reaching the Collegio's administration after the passing of Sacerdoti³⁴.

The expulsion and departure for Palestine

Due to his duties in Rome, Artom did not exclude the possibility of requesting that he be granted «to exercise his *libera docenza* outside of Florence»³⁵; however, he still intended to hold his course for the academic year 1937-38³⁶. He could certainly not have imagined, entering the classroom on 12 May 1938, that that lecture would be his last within the university walls³⁷.

In June 1939, the rector Arrigo Serpieri notified him of the «Decadenza dall'abilitazione alla libera docenza» [whereby Artom could no longer exercise his teaching qualification at university]:

I am informing you that the Minister of National Education, with a note dated 2 June 1939 XVII n. 2190 Div. III Pos. 11, communicates that with Ministerial Decree dated 18 March 1939 XVII, your *libera docenza* in «Hebrew language and literature» has been declared as forfeited on 14 December 1938 XVII, on account of your belonging to the Jewish race, in application of art. 8 of the R.D.L. 15 November 1938 XVII n. 1779 and art.

³² *Rabbi Artom lascia la cattedra rabbinica di Firenze per assumere l'insegnamento nel Collegio Rabbinico Italiano*, «Israel» XX, 49, 12 September 1935, p. 8.

³³ These conflicts date back to 1928-1929, CAHJP, *Archivio della famiglia Artom*, P171, b. 44, «Vertenza con il Consiglio dell'U. Israelitica di Firenze». See also Piattelli, *Angelo Sacerdoti*, cit., p. 92.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 90-92; *Rabbi Artom assume la direzione del Collegio Rabbinico Italiano*, «Israel» XXI, 12, 2 January 1936, p. 6.

³⁵ ASUFi, *Fondo Liberi docenti*, b. 3, f. 60 «Artom Elia Samuele», letter from E. S. Artom to the dean of the School of Letters and Philosophy of the University of Florence, Rome, 30 June 1937.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ ASUFi, *Fondo Liberi docenti*, b. 3, f. 60 «Artom Elia Samuele», «Registro delle Lezioni di Lingua e Letteratura Ebraica dettate dal Sig. Prof. Elia Samuele Artom nell'anno scolastico 1937-1938 – XVIº, R. Università degli Studi di Firenze, Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia»; Elia S. Artom, *Umberto Cassuto*, cit., p. 451.

8 of the R.D.L. 17 November 1938 XVII n. 1728³⁸.

They had not even bothered to correctly transcribe the name of their colleague, of whom they were ridding themselves with such zeal and efficiency as if he were a waste³⁹.

Artom therefore decided to leave the country. He had no doubts about the destination: Eretz Israel was the only place that could guarantee a future for his family, given the circumstances. «We are all longtime Zionists», he wrote to the Jewish Agency while requesting an immigration certificate for his son Meir⁴⁰. On 13 September 1939 he arrived in Haifa with Ruben, his youngest son.⁴¹ His wife Giulia had died three years earlier; as for the other children, Emanuele (Menachem)⁴² had remained in Italy to take care of the shipment of the family's furniture and personal effects.⁴³ Emanuele joined his father and younger brother on 14 December with a student immigration certificate that his father obtained through the Hebrew University of Jerusalem⁴⁴. Meir was in

³⁸ Ibid., «Decadenza dall'abilitazione alla libera docenza», letter from Arrigo Serpieri (rector of the University of Florence) to E. S. Artom, Florence, June 1939.

³⁹ Ibid., the letter is, in fact, addressed to Elia *Emanuele Artom* (emphasis added). Swearing allegiance to the regime in the presence of the rector Serpieri, as per regulation, just a year earlier, as did his brother-in-law Umberto Cassuto in 1931, was to no avail. Ibid., «Atto di giuramento del Sig. Prof. Elia Samuele Artom», Florence, 10 June 1938; on Cassuto see ACS, Ministry of Public Education, Directorate General of University Education, first Division, *Fascicoli personali dei professori ordinari, III versamento 1940-1970*, b. 105, f. «Cassuto Umberto»; P. Guarnieri and A. Legnaioli, *Umberto (Moshe David) Cassuto*, cit., p. 5, n17.

⁴⁰ CAHJP, *Archivio della famiglia Artom*, P171, b. 25, letter from E. S. Artom to the Aliyah Department of the Jewish Agency, n.p., 14 January 1944 (in Hebrew).

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Not to be confused with the homonymous cousin, son of Emilio (brother of Elia Samuele) and Amalia Segre, born in Aosta on 23 June 1915, member of the «Justice and Freedom» movement – like his father – and partisan, denounced and captured when he was in Val Germanasca. He was tortured and killed by Arturo Dal Dosso, an officer of the Italian SS, on 7 April 1944. He was awarded the silver medal posthumously, and a street and the Jewish School were named after him in Turin. See Archive of the Center for Contemporary Jewish Documentation (hereinafter CDEC), *Fondo Emanuele Artom, Su Emanuele Artom, Note storico-bibliografiche*, b. 1, f. 13, *Processo penale contro Dal Dosso, Malanga, Peccolo Besso*, <<http://digital-library.cdec.it>> (accessed 15 September 2020); E. L. Rossi Artom, *Gli Artom*, cit., p. 204.

⁴³ The *Certificate of Origin and Interest*, presented to the English Consulate in Florence for the shipment of the goods, is signed by Emanuele and dated 5 December 1939, CAHJP, *Archivio della famiglia Artom*, P171, b. 25.

⁴⁴ Ibid., postcard from the Hebrew University, Administrative office to E. S. Artom, Jerusalem, 26 October 1939 (in Hebrew); letter from E. S. Artom to the Aliyah Department of the Jewish Agency, n.p., 14 January 1944 (in Hebrew); E. L. Rossi Artom, *Gli Artom*, cit., p. 209.

the *hakhshara* of Cevoli, near Pisa, and was supposed to leave once he had obtained the certificate⁴⁵. The declaration of hostility between Italy and the United Kingdom came first, which precluded him from joining his family. David instead had preceded them all; he had settled down in Palestine, in *kibbutz* Rodges, near Petah Tikvah, in December 1938. A few months after his father's arrival, however, he fell ill with meningitis and died on 23 November 1939 at the age of 21⁴⁶.

The strenuous search for a job

Upon his arrival, Artom immediately endeavored to «find, within a not too long time, some occupation that would allow my 11½-year-old son and me to live, even very modestly». Well aware of the uncertain waters that he, like the rest of the country, found himself crossing, he had few hopes: «It goes without saying that I would be willing to consider any job offer of which I am capable»⁴⁷. To this end, he contacted Irgun 'Olè Italia, which a few months later would take care of the transfer of the Artom family's possessions from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, where in the meantime he and his children had settled. The organization Irgun 'Olè Italia, set up in Tel Aviv on 19 March 1939 by the

⁴⁵ The *hakhsharot* were agricultural centers of socialist Zionist orientation, running training programs for young Jews who intended to settle in Palestine. See Marcella Simoni, *Young Italian Jews in Israel, and Back: Voices from a Generation (1945-1953)*, in Francesca Bregoli, Carlotta Ferrara degli Uberti and Guri Schwarz (eds.), *Italian Jewish Networks from the Seventeenth to the Twentieth Century. Bridging Europe and the Mediterranean*, New York, NY, Springer Science+Business Media, 2018, pp. 173-200, in particular pp. 181-182 <<https://doi.org>> (accessed 15 September 2020). Meir Artom was not alone in these circumstances: see Arturo Marzano, "Prisoners of Hope" or "Amnesia"? *The Italian Holocaust Survivors and Their Aliyah to Israel*, in Laura Brazzo and Guri Schwarz (eds.), *Jews in Europe after the Shoah. Studies and Research Perspectives*, «Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History. Journal of the Fondazione CDEC», 1, 2010, pp. 92-107, in particular p. 104 <<https://www.quest-cdecjournal.it>> (accessed 15 September 2020).

⁴⁶ CAHJP, *Archivio della famiglia Artom*, P171, b. 25, curriculum vitae, n.p., n.d. (in Hebrew). This is a different curriculum from the one mentioned in note 6 and drafted a few days after 29 May 1940, when the immigration certificate for Meir was issued: «The third [son] aged 19 is still in Italy, he received an immigration certificate a few days ago and is waiting for the opportunity to come here». See also *ibid.*, letter from the Government of Palestine, Department of Migration, Tel-Aviv Immigration Office, to the principal of the Mikveh Israel agricultural school, Tel Aviv, 29 May 1940.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, letter from E. S. Artom to Irgun 'Olè Italia, n.p., 13 October 1939.

Committee of Italian *'olim*, had as its primary mission the assistance to Jews who came to Palestine from Italy. However, Irgun *'Olè Italia*, which aspired to the role of center of social and cultural aggregation for those who would later become the *'Italkim* (the Jewish community of Italian origin in the land of Israel), initially encountered opposition from the more observant Jews, among them Alfonso Pacifici,⁴⁸ who sought alternative forms of organization. Artom also took steps to reactivate and expand his local network of contacts. Even before his departure he had written to Harry Torczyner (1886-1973, later Naftali Herz Tur-Sinai), a professor of Bible at the Hebrew University and the future first president of the Academy of the Hebrew Language, to help him find a job. Torczyner had not hidden the difficulty of the situation:

My very esteemed friend,
I received your letter. Indeed, it is not easy, but I will do everything in my power. And let's hope to find something suitable for you.
With great esteem⁴⁹

The responses of Hiram Pflaum (1900-1962), professor of Romance languages, and Moshe Zvi Segal (1876-1968), professor of Bible – both at the Hebrew University – are very similar. Segal was delighted «that you intend to make *aliyah* in Israel and settle here». Nevertheless, he indicated that he was uncertain on how to help him, although he promised that «if the opportunity arises to assist you, I will do it with pleasure. The situation in Israel is extremely difficult at the moment, but let us hope that God will help us. I will be happy if you honor me with a visit upon your arrival in Jerusalem»⁵⁰.

In mid-August, Artom received a reply also from his colleague Abraham

⁴⁸ Angelo M. Piattelli, *La sinagoga di rito italiano e la Hevrat Yehudè Italia li'fulà ruhanit a Gerusalemme (1940-1952)*, «La Rassegna mensile di Israel», 80, 2-3, 2014, pp. 115-140, in particular p. 116.

⁴⁹ CAHJP, *Archivio della famiglia Artom*, P171, b. 25, letter from Harry Torczyner to E. S. Artom, Jerusalem, 30 July 1939 (in Hebrew).

⁵⁰ Ibid., letter from Hiram Pflaum to E. S. Artom, Jerusalem, 27 July 1939; letter from Moshe Z. Segal to E. S. Artom, Jerusalem, 4 August 1939 (both in Hebrew). Segal had recently been joined by Artom's brother-in-law, Umberto Cassuto, in teaching the Bible at the Hebrew University. Cassuto had emigrated with his wife Bice and daughters Milka and Lea, arriving in Haifa on 5 June. See P. Guarnieri and A. Legnaioli, *Umberto (Moshe David) Cassuto*, cit., pp. 5-7; 11-12. On Pflaum see Shaked Gilboa, *Peri, Hiram*, in F. Skolnik and M. Berenbaum (eds.), *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, cit., vol. 15, p. 771.

Kahana, with whom he had collaborated a few years earlier on the Hebrew edition, with commentary, of the so-called Apocrypha of the Bible:

My dear friend,
the news that your salvation is approaching gave me immense joy, but my health conditions in recent days prevented me from answering your letter. I thought about your situation once you arrive: nothing definitive has occurred to me for the moment, but I believe that only when you are here will you find your way practically; and you will see what is before you. Perhaps you will immediately find a translation job of some books into Hebrew. In any case we must not despair.
I believe that even without my advice, you know that you should pursue everything you can accomplish on your own, especially your books – don't scorn the little things, even the Jewish press. Everything will be helpful to you, and know that the books on Jewish subjects, even if they don't bring much money, are nevertheless a source of income⁵¹.

Artom found his «way», but this turned out to be far steeper and more tortuous than Kahana had anticipated.

Once he arrived «safe and sound in Israel on the evening of R[osh] H[a-shanah]», the Jewish New Year, Artom wrote to each of the three professors promising to visit them in Jerusalem immediately after Yom Kippur, which fell that year on 23 September. Until then, in fact, Artom would be «busy with everything that needs to be done at Customs and the Ministry of Health, as well as in other ministries in order to obtain an identity card and a travel permit»⁵². After Kippur, Torczyner put Artom in contact with Eliezer Rieger (1896-1951), professor of pedagogy at the Hebrew University, and future second director general of the Ministry of Education and Culture of Israel (1951-1954), who «welcomed him warmly». Rieger introduced him to Yaakov Sh. Engel, superintendent of the schools of the «Mizrachi», for a possible teaching position, but Engel «told me that he had no advice to give me and left me no room to hope that I could get a teaching position in the schools mentioned»⁵³.

⁵¹ CAHJP, *Archivio della famiglia Artom*, P171, b. 25, letter from Abraham Kahana to E. S. Artom, Tel Aviv, 15 August 1939 (in Hebrew).

⁵² Ibid., draft letter from E. S. Artom to H. Pflaum, H. Torczyner and M. Z. Segal (separate mailings), n.p., n.d. (in Hebrew). Considering the precise references in the letter, Artom sent it after his arrival (13 September 1939), and before 23 September.

⁵³ Ibid., draft letter from E. S. Artom to H. Torczyner, n.p., 27 September 1939 (in Hebrew). The

In the meantime, while waiting to settle in Jerusalem, from 15 October Artom found hospitality at Mrs. Esther Berliner's, 52 Yarkon Rd., Tel Aviv⁵⁴. In those same days Pflaum probed the ground at the Hebrew University regarding the possibility of introducing the teaching of Italian at the institution; he was told that, in the event that «the need and will to establish a temporary course of study» were recognized, they would check the possibility of a small grant to pay him. Naturally, Pflaum promised Artom that he would endeavor to ensure that he be offered the position, but it was not excluded that other candidates would apply. Finally, he suggested that Artom contact rector Fränkel through his brother-in-law, Umberto Cassuto⁵⁵.

However, the latter replied to Artom that his intercession with the rector «seemed to him neither possible nor of any help», given his own situation. A few months after his arrival in Palestine, Cassuto had complained about the meager 15 Palestine pounds of his monthly salary considering that he had to support his entire family with it. The leadership of the Hebrew University did not welcome his complaints since the university was going through an unprecedented financial crisis and everyone there received low wages, including other Italian professors such as the illustrious physicist Giulio Racah and the Florentine psychologist Enzo Bonaventura⁵⁶.

On the other hand, Artom did not need an intermediary to get to Fränkel, whom he had known for some years⁵⁷. He therefore turned directly to him,

Mizrachi is a religious Zionist movement founded in 1902 in Vilnius. The reference to the East is purely formal, since the name is the acronym of *Merkaz Ruchani* [Spiritual Center]. On the important role of Eliezer Rieger in shaping the Israeli education system, see Alexander M. Dushkin, *Rieger, Eliezer*, in F. Skolnik and M. Berenbaum (eds.), *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, cit., vol. 17, p. 293. Concerning Yaakov Sh. Engel see *Dr Yaakov Shalom Engel*, in David Tidhar, *Entsiklopedyah le-halutse ha-yishuv u-vonav* [Encyclopedia of the Founders and Builders of Israel], vol. 5, Tel Aviv, Hotza'at Mechaber, 1952, p. 2230 <<http://www.tidhar.tourolib.org>> (accessed 15 September 2020, in Hebrew).

⁵⁴ CAHJP, *Archivio della famiglia Artom*, P171, b. 25, draft letter from E. S. Artom to H. Pflaum, n.p., 14 October 1939 (in Hebrew); draft letter from E. S. Artom to Irgun 'Olè Italia, n.p., 13 October 1939.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, letter from H. Pflaum to E. S. Artom, Jerusalem, 15 October 1939 (in Hebrew).

⁵⁶ P. Guarnieri and A. Legnaioli, *Umberto (Moshe David) Cassuto*, cit., pp. 14-18. These three scholars were the Italians, whose posts were funded by the Emergency Committee in Aid of Displaced Foreign Scholars of New York (ECADFS) from 1940 to January 1944.

⁵⁷ CAHJP, *Archivio della famiglia Artom*, P171, b. 25, draft letter from E. S. Artom to H. Pflaum,

begging him to make every effort to ensure that the position be given to him. The rector stated that he was unaware of any project for the institution of a course of study in Italian; nevertheless, he assured his support for Artom's candidacy «whose successful activity both in Italy and in Eretz Israel over the course of many years is well known to me»⁵⁸. The Rabbi's hopes, however, were doomed to shatter a month later.

On the same day when Artom lost his son David, who was struck down by a fulminating meningitis, Fränkel informed him that the University was willing to institute a course in Italian «only if funding for this project is provided by the Italian Jewish communities residing in Israel. However, to date, it is not clear whether there are possibilities in this regard, and it goes without saying that the University for its part will not be able to take official steps in this direction». In his letter, the rector added a post scriptum: «I shudder at the news of the tragedy that struck you with the death of your son of beloved memory, whom I also had the opportunity to meet and appreciate. May the Place [God] console you among those who mourn in Zion and Jerusalem»⁵⁹.

Artom showed uncommon resilience: «[...] despite everything I have not lost heart and I am sure that from heaven they will have compassion for me and my son». And he did not fail to reiterate to Fränkel that he was «looking for some employment, of any kind, with which I can support myself and my family even modestly» and that he would be grateful for his help⁶⁰.

By mid-December he awaited the arrival of his son Emanuele, as he wrote to Simcha Assaf (1889-1953), who was professor of Rabbinic literature, a member of the Executive Committee at the Hebrew University and later its rector (1948-1950), and a member of the state Supreme Court of Israel.

Yesterday I had to leave Jerusalem, as I received a telegram from my son Menachem – may G[od] p[reserve] h[im] and m[ake] h[im] l[ive] – (who

n.p., 23 October 1939 (in Hebrew).

⁵⁸ Ibid., draft letter from E. S. Artom to Abraham H. Fränkel, n.p., 23 October 1939; letter from A. H. Fränkel a E. S. Artom, Jerusalem, 27 October 1939 (both in Hebrew).

⁵⁹ Ibid., letter from A. H. Fränkel to E. S. Artom, Jerusalem, 23 November 1939 (in Hebrew).

⁶⁰ Ibid., draft letter from E. S. Artom to A. H. Fränkel, n.p., n.d. (in Hebrew).

was among those who attended your lectures in 1934) in which he announces that he will arrive, if G[od] w[ills], this week and I want to meet him in Haifa [...] ⁶¹.

The move and the shipment of furniture and two bicycles further weighed on the family budget, already severely affected by the spoliation prescribed by the anti-Jewish laws and by the expenses for travel and living in Palestine:

[...] I need to find some employment, since the little money I had available and which I managed to bring here is less and less every day. But here I don't have many acquaintances and for this reason if you could and were kind enough to introduce me and recommend me to important people who may perhaps offer me a job in a school or an academic institution, this would be considered a great *mitzvah* [...] ⁶².

The final bill reached the non-negligible figure of 19,260 Palestine pounds, of which Artom had already paid 9 and which included transport costs to Jerusalem – where he had moved in the meantime – and the assistance provided by Irgun 'Olè Italia. A full-time professor from the Hebrew University in those years was earning a monthly salary of 30 Palestine pounds; his brother-in-law Umberto Cassuto was earning 15. Artom, not even those ⁶³.

The need to provide for his family led Artom to pursue any source of income. He even turned to lawyer Joseph Aharony, whom his son David had consulted about a permit to «remain in Israel permanently». David had then paid a deposit; since he had died, his father asked that he be reimbursed the deposit ⁶⁴. Unfortunately, however, David's visa had expired on 15 July, so that at the «time of Mr. ARTOMS' [*sic*] death he was illegally in Palestine», as the Department of Migration in Tel Aviv did not fail to underscore in order to deny his father any reimbursement ⁶⁵.

Following the advice of his friend Abraham Kahana, Artom turned to the religiously inspired literary weekly *Ba-mishor*, to which Kahana himself

⁶¹ Ibid., draft letter from E. S. Artom to Simcha Assaf, n.p., n.d. (in Hebrew). On Assaf see Moshe Nahum Zobel, *Assaf (Osofsky), Sim'Êa*, in F. Skolnik and M. Berenbaum (eds.), *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, cit., vol. 2, pp. 594-595.

⁶² Letter cited in the previous note.

⁶³ Ibid., letter from Irgun 'Olè Italia to E. S. Artom, Tel Aviv, 10 January 1940; Invoice, Benjamin Plascow shipping company, Tel Aviv, 10 January 1940. Artom settled the bill five days later.

⁶⁴ Ibid., draft letter from E. S. Artom to Joseph Aharony, n.p., 24 January 1940 (in Hebrew).

⁶⁵ Ibid., copy of the letter from Cecil Arnott (Assistant Commissioner for Migration) to J.

contributed. He asked that he be hired as a free-lance journalist; and they said they would be happy to welcome him⁶⁶. Artom also wrote to the Dvir publishing house in Tel Aviv; he proposed to them a project for a Hebrew-Italian/Italian-Hebrew dictionary, which he believed could «be useful now that immigrants of Italian origin have increased in Israel and that in Italy too there are a good number of people interested in the Hebrew language». He enclosed numerous names, who could be asked for references⁶⁷, from Hanoch Albeck (1890-1972), professor of Talmud at the Hebrew University, whose contribution to the study of Rabbinical literature had great merit, to Joseph Klausner (1874-1958), a historian and a linguist, who was professor of Hebrew literature and history of Second Temple Judaism at the Hebrew University, wrote extensively on the revival of Hebrew and was president of the Academy of the Hebrew Language. He was a great-uncle of the writer Amos Oz and a fervent Zionist; he would run for the presidential elections of 1949 against Chaim Weizmann⁶⁸. Artom's network of acquaintances, therefore, had certainly expanded within the academic intellectual circles of the *Yishuv*. He also asked Assaf and Kahana for help⁶⁹. In any case, the publishing house declined the proposed dictionary: «in the current difficult situation we cannot publish it, as this requires a considerable investment»⁷⁰. Artom's tireless search bore its first fruits six months after his arrival in Palestine. He had a «probationary» position as a teacher of history and literature at the Shaare Zion *yeshiva* (Jewish religious school) in Jerusalem,

Aharony, Tel Aviv, 11 March 1940.

⁶⁶ Ibid., draft letter from E. S. Artom to the editorial staff of the weekly «Ba-mishor», n.p., 17 January 1940 (in Hebrew); letter from the editorial staff of the weekly «Ba-mishor» to E. S. Artom, Jerusalem, 22 February 1940. See also <<https://web.nli.org.il>> (accessed 15 September 2020, in Hebrew).

⁶⁷ Ibid., draft letter from E. S. Artom to the publishing house Dvir, Jerusalem, 11 February 1940 (in Hebrew).

⁶⁸ Moshe David Herr, *Albeck, family of talmudic scholars*, in F. Skolnik and M. Berenbaum (eds.), *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, cit., vol. 1, pp. 587-588; Samuel Werses, Meir Medan and David Flusser, *Klausner, Joseph Gedaliah*, in *ibid.*, vol. 12, pp. 215-217.

⁶⁹ CAHJP, *Archivio della famiglia Artom*, P171, b. 25, draft letter from E. S. Artom to S. Assaf, n.p., n.d.; draft letter from E. S. Artom to A. Kahana, n.p., 8 November 1939.

⁷⁰ Ibid., letter from Mordekhai Bernstein (director of the Dvir publishing house) to E. S. Artom, Tel Aviv, 25 February 1940 (in Hebrew).

under Ben-Zion Meir Hai Uziel (1880-1953), Sephardi Chief Rabbi of Mandatory Palestine, then of the state of Israel. He began teaching on 26 March 1940, for three hours a week⁷¹. That job was certainly not enough, but Artom sought work and not charity:

I am afraid that perhaps today, when I had the honor of meeting His Excellency,⁷² my words were not as clear as they should have been. For this reason, I wish to tell you that I will gladly accept any task that will allow me to continue my work in the area of teaching, in which I have worked abroad for thirty years, so that I can support myself; but I do not intend to accept cash contributions from anyone, since, although I still do not have a permanent job here after eight months from the day of my arrival, I still hope that the Lord in His mercy will help me [...]⁷³.

In the following years, Artom's position within the *yeshiva* would not improve. He complained to rav Uziel several times about the frequent delays in receiving his salary, while the hours of teaching increased⁷⁴.

On 20 June 1940, like his son Emanuele, he submitted an application to the Superintendent's Office of the Department of Education of the Jewish National Council to «be included among the candidates for teaching in the schools of Eretz Israel»⁷⁵. Given their adherence to religious Zionism, both expressed their preference for «Mizrachi» schools. He requested a certificate of service from the director of the Tachkemoni School in Tel Aviv, where he had taught in 1933-34⁷⁶. Furthermore, he wrote to David Prato (1882-1951):

Dearest,
Although this is not the best time to make plans for the future, in these days both Emanuele and I have submitted our official application to the *misrad ha-mefakchim* [the Superintendent's Office] in Tel Aviv for a

⁷¹ Ibid., draft letter from E. S. Artom to Ben-Zion Meir Hai Uziel, n.p., 21 March 1940 (in Hebrew).

⁷² Artom addresses the Sephardi Chief Rabbi with the title of *ma'alat kevod torato*, here loosely translated as «His Excellency».

⁷³ Ibid., draft letter from E. S. Artom to Ben-Zion M. H. Uziel, n.p., 14 May 1940 (in Hebrew).

⁷⁴ Ibid., various draft letters from E. S. Artom to Ben-Zion M. H. Uziel, Jerusalem, 3 February 1941; 30 May 1941; 26 November 1941; 4 February 1942 (all in Hebrew). However, Artom did not get more than 3 Palestine pounds per month for the lectures that he gave at the *yeshiva*.

⁷⁵ Ibid., typed draft letter from E. S. Artom to the Superintendent's Office of the Department of Education of the Jewish National Council, Jerusalem, 20 June 1940 (in Hebrew). Artom corrected the text with an overwritten note as follows: «The undersigned requests this esteemed Office to give me employment as a teacher in the schools of the Jewish National Council's Department of Education».

⁷⁶ Ibid., draft letter from E. S. Artom to Y. Marshek, n.p., n.d.; replies from Y. Marshek to E. S.

teaching position in the *va'ad le'umi* [Jewish National Council] schools for next year. We attached the documents that we had at our disposal [...]. But we know very well that more than all this, a good word from an authoritative and influential person can be useful. You certainly have acquaintances among the *mefakchim* [inspectors, superintendents] and among those who are in charge of filling positions, and I have no doubt you will want to do something for us⁷⁷.

The letter in Hebrew that he sent to Harry Torczyner the same day reads almost the same. Since we lack both answers, we do not know if the two illustrious acquaintances really intervened. For 1940-41 he was offered to teach Hebrew and history at the high school of the «Doresh Zion» Center in Jerusalem, then directed by Alfonso Pacifici, but he «doubted that this school [would] reopen for the next school year»⁷⁸. In October 1941 he was offered to teach «Hebrew Language and Biblical, Talmudic and Medieval Hebrew Literature in the Beth-Hannah Jewish Female Gymnasium (in Italy: Lyceum)», founded and directed by Hanna Miriam Spitzer (1886-1955), a pioneer of Jewish women's education in Mandatory Palestine. Artom willingly accepted, not before asking Y. Sh. Engel and rav Yaakov Berman (1878-1974), respectively superintendent and chief superintendent of the Mizrahi schools, that they be «so kind as to consent to the aforementioned proposal». Artom taught in that girls' school until 1952⁷⁹. His job search did

Artom, Tel Aviv, 9 June 1940; and from E. S. Artom to Y. Marshek, n.p., 10 June 1940 (all in Hebrew). See also note 26 above. On the sending of teachers in charge of promoting the study of Italian language and culture in Mandatory Palestine, see A. M. Piattelli, *La sinagoga di rito italiano*, cit., p. 121, n16.

⁷⁷ CAHJP, *Archivio della famiglia Artom*, P171, b. 25, draft letter from E. S. Artom to David Prato, n.p., 24 June 1940. Almost identical is the letter in Hebrew that he sent, the same day, to H. Torczyner. See A. M. Piattelli, *David Prato, una vita per l'ebraismo*, «La Rassegna mensile di Israel», 79, 1-3, 2013, pp. 109-232.

⁷⁸ CAHJP, *Archivio della famiglia Artom*, P171, b. 25, draft letter from E. S. Artom to unknown addressee, n.p., 8 August 1941 (in Hebrew). He was responding to an advertisement for «a great school» looking for a «principal who masters the Hebrew language» published in «Davar», the newspaper of the *Histadrut* (the workers' union), founded by Berl Katznelson and Moshe Beilinson in 1925. It is unclear whether Artom responds to the announcement by writing to the newspaper or directly to the school.

⁷⁹ CAHJP, *Archivio della famiglia Artom*, P171, b. 25, draft letter from E. S. Artom to Y. Sh. Engel and rav Yaakov Berman, n.p., 23 October 1941 (in Hebrew); *ibid.*, b. 23, «Cenni sulla attività didattica e scientifica del Prof. Elia S. Artom nel periodo settembre 1939-ottobre 1944», n.p., n.d. (but after 2 November 1944, the date of the letter from Monsignor Silvio Oddi to Artom, to whose reply the document cited here was attached); «Notizie generali», n.p., n.d., attached to a draft letter from E. S. Artom to the Personnel Office of the University of Florence, Jerusalem, 21

not end there: still in 1942 he answered an advertisement for a place at the «Moria» high school in Tel Aviv and asked Moshe Auerbach (1881-1976), Rabbi and principal of Petah Tikva's «Netzach Israel» school, for a recommendation⁸⁰. That same year, Artom was officially hired, in a paid position, as Rabbi of the Italian Temple in Jerusalem⁸¹.

To get his son Meir to Palestine

Artom's constant concern was to reunite his family. He had managed to obtain a visa for himself that was also valid for his son Ruben since he was a minor. Davide had already been in Palestine since December 1938; Emanuele arrived there later, thanks to a permit obtained through the Hebrew University at the beginning of October 1939. The problem remained for Meir who was then in the *hakhshara* of Cevoli, near Pisa, to receive agriculture training so that he could get a certificate of *'aliyah* as a farmer and, later, a job in Palestine⁸². Irgun 'Olè Italia suggested to Artom to enroll him at the university, which was considered the safest way to obtain a permit, and to «inquire with Professor E. Bonaventura [...] At the same time it will be necessary that the leadership in Italy, such as Varadi, Renato Levi etc., keep in mind your son's name for the next travel schedule for the haluzim»⁸³.

Artom followed the advice only in part: he enrolled Meir not at the Hebrew University, but at the Mikveh Israel agricultural school, founded on the

April 1964. On Hanna M. Spitzer see *Hanna Miryam Spitzer*, in D. Tidhar, *Entsiklopedyah*, cit., vol. 3, 1949, p. 1181, <<http://www.tidhar.tourolib.org>> (accessed 15 September 2020, in Hebrew); <<https://web.nli.org.il>> (accessed 5 October 2020). Regarding rav Berman see *Ha-rav Ya'akov Berman*, in D. Tidhar, *Entsiklopedyah*, cit., vol. 4, 1950, pp. 1757-1758 <<http://www.tidhar.tourolib.org>> (accessed 5 October 2020, in Hebrew); Abraham Wein, *Berman, Jacob*, in F. Skolnik, M. Berenbaum (eds.), *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, cit., vol. 3, p. 462.

⁸⁰ CAHJP, *Archivio della famiglia Artom*, P171, b. 25, draft letter from E. S. Artom to Moshe Auerbach, n.p., 5 August 1942; M. Auerbach's reply to E. S. Artom, Petah Tikvah, 14 August 1942 (both in Hebrew).

⁸¹ A. M. Piattelli, *La sinagoga di rito italiano*, cit., pp. 122-123.

⁸² CAHJP, *Archivio della famiglia Artom*, P171, b. 25, draft letter from E. S. Artom to Irgun 'Olè Italia, n.p., 12 February 1940.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, letter from Irgun 'Olè Italia to E. S. Artom, Tel Aviv, 5 March 1940. Irgun 'Olè Italia had already advised Artom in this regard, *ibid.*, letter from Irgun 'Olè Italia to E. S. Artom, Tel Aviv, 17 October 1939, in response to Artom's letter of 13 October. Regarding Enzo Bonaventura,

initiative of Charles Netter of the Alliance Israélite Universelle in 1870⁸⁴. The tuition, however, was too high for him. Irgun 'Olè Italia, which had dealt with the enrollment process at the school, informed Artom that David Prato had «phoned Mique and [...] obtained from the secretary, Mr. Pinhas, the promise that they would keep this special case in mind and would apply the maximum possible reduction on tuition fees»⁸⁵.

The registration fee was discounted by 10 Palestine pounds, far less than expected. However, on 29 May 1940, the certificate for Meir was issued to him with a recommendation: his son should «go immediately to the Consulate for a visa and leave before it is too late. It is not necessary to tell you that in these frantic days it is better to hurry as much as possible»⁸⁶.

Artom wasted no time: the certificate, which expired on 30 September,

was delivered to me in a sealed envelope, addressed to the English Consulate in Rome on the very day of its issue (29 May 1940) by the Tel Aviv Immigration Office. I personally delivered it to the Tel Aviv post office the same day for dispatch by registered airmail. [...] On 3 June 1940 my son Meir, to whom I had telegraphed about receiving the certificate, wrote to me that he had received my telegr[am] and proposed to go to Rome the next day to receive the certificate and obtain the visa. I then received no other communication from him prior to Italy's entry into the war⁸⁷.

The Kingdom of Italy declared war on France and the United Kingdom on 10 June. The next day Artom wrote to Samuel Scheps (1904-1999), then director

professor of psychology at the Hebrew University, expelled from the University of Florence and arrived in Jerusalem a year earlier, see P. Guarnieri, *Enzo (Joseph) Bonaventura*, in Ead., *Intellettuali in fuga*, cit. <<http://intellettualinfuga.fupress.com>> (accessed 5 October 2020).

⁸⁴ Efraim Orni and Shaked Gilboa, *Mikveh Israel*, in F. Skolnik and M. Berenbaum (eds.), *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, cit., vol. 14, p. 230.

⁸⁵ CAHJP, *Archivio della famiglia Artom*, P171, b. 25, letter from Irgun 'Olè Italia to E. S. Artom, Tel Aviv, 17 May 1940. The sum estimated for the three years was 220 Palestine pounds, which could «in exceptional cases» and at the discretion of the director be reduced up to 130 pounds.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, draft letter from E. S. Artom to B. Z. M. H. Uziel, n.p., 9 June 1940 (in Hebrew), in which Artom warned that he could not hold the agreed lecture at the Shaare Zion *yeshiva*, because he had to go to collect the certificate; letter from the Department of Migration, Tel-Aviv Immigration Office, to the principal of the Mikveh Israel Agricultural School, Tel Aviv, 29 May 1940; letter from Eliyyahu Krause (principal of the Mikve Israel Agricultural School) to E. S. Artom, Tel Aviv, 31 May 1940 (in Hebrew); draft letter from E. S. Artom to Irgun 'Olè Italia, n.p., 16 August 1943.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, letter from E. S. Artom to Irgun 'Olè Italia, n.p., 16 August 1943.

of the Palestine Office in Geneva, asking him if there was still any chance for Meir to leave⁸⁸. He confided to the principal of the Tachkemoni school in Tel Aviv: «I managed to obtain an immigration certificate for my son Meir too – may G[od] p[reserve] h[im] and m[ake] h[im] l[ive] – who had remained in Italy, but who knows if and when he will be able to come»⁸⁹. He did not have much hope.

Ten days later he wrote again to the principal, asking for the return of the tuition, convinced that his son would not be able to benefit from it. The school tried to postpone the refund; the actual possibilities of emigrating for the Italian *'olim*, after the war declaration, were unclear, and the validity of the certificates that had been issued but remained unused was extended several times⁹⁰.

At the end of October, however, the headmaster yielded to Artom's insistence; he returned part of the tuition (70 Palestine pounds) and promised to give him the remaining amount in the following January. In March, still nothing; only in April did they give him his due⁹¹.

During the first years of the war, contact with his son was almost completely interrupted⁹². After the landing of the allies in Italy and the armistice of 8

⁸⁸ Ibid., draft letter from E. S. Artom to Samuel Scheps, n.p., 11 June 1940 (in French). The Scheps papers relating to this period and his Zionist activity are held at The Central Zionist Archives, A496, *Scheps, Samuel*, <<http://www.zionistarchives.org.il>> (accessed 5 October 2020). The rest of his personal archive is in Zürich, The Archives of Contemporary History, *Nachlässe und Einzelbestände, S-Z, Scheps, Samuel*, <<http://onlinearchives.ethz.ch>> (accessed 5 October 2020).

⁸⁹ CAHJP, *Archivio della famiglia Artom*, P171, b. 25, draft letter from E. S. Artom to Y. Marshek, n.p., 10 June 1940 (in Hebrew).

⁹⁰ Ibid., draft letter from E. S. Artom to the Administration of the Mikve Israel school, n.p., 20 June 1940; letter from E. Krause to E. S. Artom, Tel Aviv, 1 July 1940; E. S. Artom to the Administration of the Mikve Israel school, n.p., 2 July 1940 and 30 July 1940; E. Krause to E. S. Artom, Tel Aviv, 1 August 1940; E. S. Artom to E. Krause, Jerusalem, 22 September 1940, in which we read that in the meantime his son Emanuele had personally gone to discuss the matter with Krause; again Artom to Krause, Jerusalem, 10 October 1940 and 27 October 1940, with no response (all in Hebrew).

⁹¹ Ibid., Krause to Artom, Tel Aviv, 29 October 1940; Artom to Krause, Jerusalem, 1 November 1940; Artom to Krause, Jerusalem, 18 March 1941; Krause to Artom, Tel Aviv, 19 March 1941 and 4 April 1941; finally Artom to the Administration of the Mikve Israel school, n.p., 7 April 1941.

⁹² Artom received news from his son on 5 October 1942, *ibid.*, letter from E. S. Artom to Irgun 'Olè Italia, n.p., 3 February 1943.

September, Artom received a letter from Meir: he had fled to Sicily and had found hospitality with the Di Piazza family in Palermo. He begged his father «to do what is possible to enable him to come here as soon as possible»: Artom should send a certificate attesting to his residence and, «if it were not possible to procure an immigration certificate on behalf [of Meir], [he should send] a request that he be allowed to come here with a declaration that he will be able to work»⁹³. Artom turned to Umberto Nahon (1905-1974), a member of the board of directors of Irgun 'Olè Italia, while his son Emanuele met with the secretary Angelo Fano (1883-1966). He also asked the Jewish Agency; they replied that they were still waiting for a response from the government regarding the resumption of emigration from Italy; nevertheless, they invited him to apply to them while waiting for circumstances to change⁹⁴. Artom lost contact with Meir again. The Jewish Agency gave him the address of Ephraim E. Urbach (1912-1991), then a military Rabbi in the British army, who was in southern Italy. Artom wrote to him, enclosing a recommendation from the Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Mandatory Palestine, Yitzchak Halevi Herzog (1888-1959):

A month ago, I received a letter from my 23-year-old son – who previously resided in Florence (Italy) – in which he told me he was in Palermo [...] I subsequently never heard from him again. I have written to him a few times but, of course, I don't know if my letters reached him. In Sicily I have no acquaintances and for this reason I come to ask you to be so kind as to do everything possible to let me know about him. If you can get in touch with him, please let him know that I, his brothers and all our relatives in Eretz Israel are all fine. And please help him if needed. And since I don't know if there is a Jewish community there in Sicily, I also ask you to be kind enough to do everything possible so that he will celebrate the next Passover according to the law⁹⁵.

⁹³ Ibid., draft letter from E. S. Artom to Irgun 'Olè Italia, n.p., 19 December 1943. The Di Piazza family resided in via Oreto. Artom had already resumed the attempts for the necessary certificate, as emerges from the letter from Angelo Fano (Irgun 'Olè Italia) to E. S. Artom, Tel Aviv, 11 August 1943; Artom's reply to Fano, 16 August 1943; again Fano to Artom, 30 August 1943, in which he assured that Irgun would submit an application for renewal of the certificate the following week.

⁹⁴ Ibid., letter from A. Fano to E. S. Artom, Tel Aviv, 24 December 1943; draft letter from E. S. Artom to the Aliyah Department of the Jewish Agency, n.p., 14 January 1944 (in Hebrew); the Aliyah Department of the Jewish Agency to Artom, Jerusalem, 20 January 1944 (in Hebrew).

⁹⁵ Ibid., draft letter from E. S. Artom to rav Ephraim E. Urbach, Jerusalem, 26 January 1944;

A few months later he managed to have 5,000 Italian lira delivered to his son through Enzo Sereni (1905-1944), who promised «to get him the certificate as soon as possible»⁹⁶. Unfortunately, he did not succeed. On 9 July Meir reached Bari, settling in *Hakhshara Deror*⁹⁷. At the end of September, rumors spread that a group of refugees in Italy were ready to leave⁹⁸. Artom did his utmost to renew the certificate that had been issued four years earlier or, alternatively, to obtain a new one⁹⁹. However, a few days later Meir warned his father that he would not leave if Miriam (1922-1997), his fiancée, did not leave with him¹⁰⁰. She was the daughter of Rabbi Rodolfo Campagnano and Anna Sacerdote; Meir had met her recently. Obtaining a permit was difficult, obtaining two of them, and at the same time, seemed almost impossible. Nevertheless, the Jewish Agency recommended the issuance of certificates in favor of the two young people, on condition that they formally applied for them to the Palestine Office in Bari¹⁰¹. Meir departed with Miriam from Taranto on 22 March 1945. Hulda, his cousin, also traveled on the same ship with her children and niece and nephews Susanna, David and Daniel, children of her cousin Nathan Cassuto and Anna Di Gioacchino. They landed in Haifa on the eve of Pesach, on 28 March 1945¹⁰².

draft letter from E. S. Artom to rav Yitzchak Halevi Herzog, 26 January 1944. On Urbach see Isaiah M. Gafni, *Ephraim Elimelech Urbach (1912-1991)*, «Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research» 59, 5-10, 1993, <<https://www.jstor.org>> (accessed 5 October 2020); CAHJP, *Archivio E. E. Urbach*, P118.

⁹⁶ CAHJP, *Archivio della famiglia Artom*, P171, b. 25, letter from A. Fano to E. S. Artom, Tel Aviv, 26 May 1944; draft letter from E. S. Artom to Ada Sereni, 27 June 1944, to whom he returns the money procured for his son, as requested by Sereni himself; A. Sereni's answer to Artom, Giv'at Brenner, 6 July 1944. It was Umberto Nahon who asked Sereni to send Meir the sum.

⁹⁷ Ibid., draft letter from E. S. Artom to Irgun 'Olè Italia, n.p., 31 August 1944.

⁹⁸ Ibid., letter from A. Fano to E. S. Artom, Tel Aviv, 29 September 1944.

⁹⁹ Ibid., draft letter from E. S. Artom to the Department of Migration, Tel Aviv Immigration Office, n.p., 18 October 1944; Artom to the Aliyah Department of the Jewish Agency, n.p., 30 October 1944.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., draft letter from E. S. Artom to Israel Libertovski, n.p., November 1944. Libertovski was a volunteer in the British army then in Italy. Artom turned to him to convey his message to his son. Miriam's brother Saul had married Meir's cousin, Hulda Cassuto, daughter of Umberto and Bice Corcos.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., draft letter from E. S. Artom to Israel Libertovski, n.p., 13 November 1944.

¹⁰² Massimo Longo Adorno, *Gli ebrei fiorentini dall'emancipazione alla Shoà*, Florence, Giuntina, 2003, p. 145.

Meir and Miriam married in Jerusalem two years later, on 6 June 1947. Meir fell ill and died a few months after the wedding, on 21 October 1947. Miriam would remarry five years later with Vito Volterra.

Elia Artom had to endure the loss of another son. Young Ruben, who enlisted in the Haganah, also lost his life on 5 April 1948 in the battle of Motza, during the war of independence¹⁰³.

The revocation of the 'forfeiture' provision

On 21 July 1944, Artom wrote to the Ministry of Education, and asked that «his rights» be reinstated «as *libero docente*»¹⁰⁴. Through Monsignor Silvio Oddi (1910-2001), member of the Apostolic Delegation of Jerusalem, the ministry notified him that «the provision by which his ability to exercise his teaching credentials had been declared 'forfeited' as a consequence of the racial laws» was revoked. The ministry did not seem particularly eager to welcome him back since they hastened to point out that «in order to exercise *libera docenza*, as for any other position in Italian universities and high schools, Italian citizenship is a necessary requirement»¹⁰⁵. Artom had never given it up.

Similarly to what happened to his brother-in-law Umberto, a veil of silence fell over the matter for the next five years. But while Cassuto was contacted by the ministry, since he held a professorship, Artom instead had to write to the secretariat of the University of Florence to find out «if and by what timeline he needs to teach a course in order for his qualifications not to expire». There was no further development on the matter and Artom never returned to the university. He saw the classrooms of San Marco again only on the occasion of the memorial speech he gave on 28 May 1952 for his brother-

¹⁰³ E. L. Rossi Artom, *Gli Artom*, cit., p. 203.

¹⁰⁴ CAHJP, *Archivio della famiglia Artom*, P171, b. 23, draft letter from E. S. Artom to MPI, Jerusalem, 21 July 1944.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, MAE, Division of Italian Citizens Abroad, no. 53/4535/405, «Appunto per il Mons. Clarizio della Segreteria di Stato di S. Santità», Rome, n.d., prior to 2 November 1944, which is the date of Oddi's letter to Artom; draft letter from Artom to the dean of the School of Letters of the University of Florence, Jerusalem, 10 October 1949.

in-law¹⁰⁶.

Failure to return to the rabbinic chair of Florence

On 17 July 1949 he arrived in Genoa; he would go on to Turin to visit his relatives. Alfredo Orvieto, with the favorable opinion of the Council of the Jewish Community of Florence, which he presided over, decided to meet Artom to propose that he return to his old chair¹⁰⁷. The Florentine community, in fact, was once again in a difficult predicament and without a guide. Kalman Friedmann (1903-1986), former Rabbi of Florence until the promulgation of the racial laws, had resumed his post for a few months; in August 1949 he had resigned¹⁰⁸. According to Orvieto, the return of Artom, «who has already held, and with worth (He is undoubtedly one of the best pupils of Rav Margulies), the office of Chief Rabbi of this Community», would allow it «to resume the noble traditions of the past without which the laborious work of material reconstruction that has largely been accomplished would be in vain» and «would constitute a great mitzvah since it would make it possible to save our Kehilla [our community] from inexorable breaking up»¹⁰⁹. Artom said he was willing to think about it:

I must premise that when, ten years ago, I left my office as a teacher in the Italian Rabbinical College and Italy, I did this with the firm intention of settling down permanently in Erez Israel, and not with that of escaping

¹⁰⁶ E.S. Artom, *Umberto Cassuto*, cit. The University of Florence continued to include his name (in some cases misspelled) in the list of professors until the year he died, University of Florence, *Annuario per gli anni accademici 1943-44-1952-53*, Florence, Empoli, Poligrafico Toscano, 1954, p. 74; University of Florence, *Annuario per gli anni accademici 1953-54-1954-55-1955-56*, Florence, Empoli, Poligrafico Toscano, 1957, p. 148; University of Florence, *Annuario 1956-1959*, Florence, 1960, p. 233; University of Florence, *Annuario 1959-1960*, Florence, 1961, p. 149; University of Florence, *Annuario 1960-1962*, Florence, 1963, p. 233; University of Florence, *Annuario 1962-1964*, Florence, 1965, p. 445; University of Florence, *Annuario 1964-1965*, Florence, 1967, p. 383.

¹⁰⁷ CAHJP, *Archivio della famiglia Artom*, P171, b. 50, letter from Alfredo Orvieto to E. S. Artom, Florence, 17 July 1949; letter from Marcello Pacifici to E. S. Artom, Florence, 18 July 1949; letter from Fernando Belgrado to E. S. Artom, Florence, 20 July 1949. Marcello Pacifici, a former pupil and a friend of the family, as well as a member of the council, and Fernando Belgrado (1913-1998), future Chief Rabbi of Florence (1963-1978), were supposed to meet him.

¹⁰⁸ A. M. Piattelli, *Repertorio*, cit.

¹⁰⁹ ACEFi, Minutes of the Community Council, Florence, 7 July 1949. CAHJP, *Archivio della famiglia Artom*, P171, b. 50, letters from A. Orvieto to E. S. Artom, Florence, 17 and 25 July 1949.

from the difficulties of the time to eventually return, at a more appropriate time, to the country where I was born and where I had carried out most of my activities.

This intention has been confirmed and strengthened in recent years, especially since today, in Israel, as a teacher in Jewish high schools, I continue to exercise a profession that is not entirely useless. There also resides the little of my family that, after my many misfortunes well known to you, still remains. Therefore, if I wanted to follow only my first impulse [...], I would certainly have to respond with a refusal [...]. But in reality, I do not feel like doing this, both because of the affection that binds me to this community, in which I spent, despite some conflicts and some troubles, perhaps the best and most fruitful period of my frantic life, and also because [...] I seem to detect that it is believed that [...] the resurgence of Jewish life in Florence in these difficult moments depends on my acceptance¹¹⁰.

He therefore made himself available, but on the condition of being able to return to Israel for no less than two months a year. Confident that the difficulties were «far from insurmountable», Orvieto immediately began negotiations for the arrival of the Turinese Rabbi¹¹¹.

At the beginning of November it seemed that the parties had reached a fundamental agreement. Two issues remained unresolved: the authorization by the Israeli government that Artom could move freely between the two countries, and the accommodation of the Rabbi in Florence¹¹². In January, quite casually, Orvieto informed Artom that he had initiated «the procedures at the Ministry to obtain the repeal of a current provision of the Community regulation, requiring that the Chief Rabbi hold Italian citizenship», a provision the Rabbi admitted to being unaware of¹¹³. Since Artom was still an Italian citizen, the aforementioned law did not prevent him from assuming the chair; however he asked that the abrogation procedure be completed before a date could be set for his assumption of office¹¹⁴.

Months went by; despite repeated reminders and numerous assurances

¹¹⁰ Ibid., draft letter from E. S. Artom to A. Orvieto, Turin, 20 July 1949.

¹¹¹ Ibid., letter from Orvieto to Artom, Florence, 25 July 1949.

¹¹² Ibid., letter from Orvieto to Artom, Florence, 6 November 1949, with attached outline of the contract and extract of the «laws in force on rabbinical matters»; draft letter from Artom to Orvieto, n.p., 20 November 1949; letter from Orvieto to Artom, Florence, 11 December 1949, in which Orvieto informed him of the premature and sudden death of Marcello Pacifici.

¹¹³ Ibid., letter from Orvieto to Artom, Florence, 16 January 1950.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., draft letters from Artom to Orvieto, n.p., 25 January and 20 February 1950.

from both the Italian and Israeli sides that nothing stood in the way of the appointment, the Israeli authorities did not issue any authorization and the Italian authorities did not modify the community regulation. In April, Artom asked to set a deadline beyond which all obligations between the parties would cease¹¹⁵. It was set for 31 May, then 15 August and again 15 October. On 8 September, the Ministry of the Interior, through the Prefecture of Florence, communicated «that he did not see the need for the requested change»; Orvieto thus declared lost all «distant hope [...] of having you as a Teacher holding the rabbinic chair of our community»¹¹⁶. The negotiations broke off; and an icy silence fell between the two sides¹¹⁷. Later, Artom allegedly argued that for him, accepting the invitation to Florence «would have been [...] a serious sacrifice; therefore the renunciation by this Hon. Council to continue negotiating was essentially something I was grateful for»¹¹⁸.

He never returned to Italy permanently. He had chosen Israel animated by those Zionist ideals that his teacher Margulies had transmitted to him. He maintained relations with his country of origin, which also had no particular scruples in rejecting him, in revoking his right to belong. He returned frequently to teach at the rabbinic school «S. H. Margulies» of Turin (in the academic years 1953-54 and 1955-58) and resumed teaching at the Italian Rabbinical College in Rome (in the academic years from 1959 to 1965), contributing to the reconstruction of Italian Judaism, which was on the verge

¹¹⁵ Ibid., draft letter from Artom to Orvieto, n.p., 10 April 1950; letter from Orvieto to Artom, Florence, 23 April 1950 with attached letter from Raffaele Cantoni (president of the Union of the Italian Israelite Communities [UCII]), Rome, 31 March 1950, and Orvieto's reply to UCII, Florence, 23 April 1950.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., copy of a letter from the Prefect of Florence to Orvieto, Florence, 8 September 1950, attached to a letter from Orvieto to Artom, Florence, 17 September 1950.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., draft letter from Artom to Orvieto, n.p., 27 September 1950, in which Artom acknowledges the situation and considers himself released from all obligations; letter from Orvieto to Artom, Florence, 24 November 1950, in which he confirms the interruption of the negotiations. Immediately afterwards the Council asked Paolo Nissim (1912-1969), who held the chair for a year from October 1951; see ACEFi, Minutes of the Community Council, Florence, 26 November 1950. On Nissim, see A. M. Piattelli, *Repertorio*, cit.

¹¹⁸ CAHJP, *Archivio della famiglia Artom*, P171, b. 50, draft letter from Artom to Orvieto, n.p., 5 August 1952.

of annihilation¹¹⁹.

It was on a school day like so many others that on 25 February 1965, Artom fell ill and died¹²⁰. He left his son Emanuele and daughter-in-law Elena Lea, with their children. In Israel, his commentary of the Bible – improperly known as *perush Cassuto*, but Cassuto had actually authored only the introduction – became widespread and appreciated. Artom, who had collaborated with his brother-in-law Umberto on numerous projects, including the critical edition of the Hebrew University's Hebrew Bible, became a member of the Academy of the Hebrew language in 1945¹²¹.

After his death, a street was named after him in Jerusalem, *Rehov Hartom* (Artom Street), near Sanhedria. He lies in the cemetery of the Mount of Olives with his sons Ruben and Emanuele.

Major publications

- *Corso pratico di grammatica ebraica*, Rome, Israel, 1928.
- *Tefillat Menashe, 'iggeret Yirmeyahu, Chazon Baruch b* [Prayer of Manasseh, Letter of Jeremiah, Greek Apocalypse of Baruch], in Abraham Kahana (ed.), *Ha-sefarim ha-chitzonim* [Apocrypha of the Bible], vol. 1, tome 2, Tel Aviv, Hotza'at mekorot, 1937.
- *La vita di Israele*, Florence, Israel, 1937 (2nd revised and enlarged ed., Florence, Israel, 1949).
- With Umberto Cassuto, *Takkanot Kandya ve-zikhronoteha* [The statutes and documents of Kandya (Crete)], Yerushalayim, Mekitze Nirdamim, 1943.
- *Sifre ha-Mikra', meforashim perush chadash be-tzeruf mevo'ot be-'arikhat M. D. Cassuto* [The Bible, new commentary with introductions ed.

¹¹⁹ ASUFI, *Fondo Liberi docenti*, b. 3, f. 60 «Artom Elia Samuele», «Notizie generali» attached to a letter from E. S. Artom to the Personnel Office of the University of Florence, Jerusalem, 21 April 1964 (copy held also in CAHJP, *Archivio della famiglia Artom*, P171, b. 23).

¹²⁰ Augusto Segre, *Elia S. Artom*, «La Rassegna mensile di Israel», 31, 5, 1965, pp. 209-215 <<https://www.jstor.org>> (accessed 5 October 2020).

¹²¹ See <<https://hebrew-academy.org.il>> (accessed 5 October 2020, in Hebrew).

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Cite as:

Alberto Legnaioli, *Elia Samuele Artom* (2020), in Patrizia Guarnieri, *Intellectuals Displaced from Fascist Italy. Migrants, Exiles and Refugees Fleeing for Political and Racial Reasons*, Firenze, Firenze University Press, 2019-
<<http://intellettualinfuga.fupress.com/en>>
e-ISBN: 978-88-6453-872-3
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Publication date: 30 December 2020.