

Emanuele Menachem Artom

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Together with his father, he was one of the most dynamic figures who contributed significantly to Italian Judaism in Italy and Israel. Among the many young Jews forced to leave the country that had disowned them, he followed in his father's footsteps as a fervent Zionist and opted for Israel, where he was one of the main drivers of the *'italkim* community. After the war, he spent a great deal of money on restoring Jewish spiritual life in the «*bel paese*», through activity as a rabbi and teacher.

Childhood and studies (rabbinical and other)

Emanuele Menachem Artom was born in Turin on 29 August 1916. The second son of Elia Samuele Artom (15 June 1887 - 25 February 1965) and Giulia Cassuto (16 August 1887 - 11 January 1936), the sister of Umberto Cassuto, he spent a good deal of his childhood and youth between Italy, Libya and Mandatory Palestine following his family, who had to move frequently because of the father's activities as a rabbi and teacher. He received from both parents a deep and inexhaustible love for their ancestral tradition, but especially for handing it on. Artom followed in his father's footsteps in embarking on a career as a rabbi, as well as mother's in choosing to teach¹.

Emanuele's childhood was devastated by the loss of his older sister, Devorà. The family had moved to Tripoli, Libya, two years earlier, when Elia Samuele

¹ Elena Rossi Artom, *Gli Artom, Storia di una famiglia della Comunità ebraica di Asti attraverso le sue generazioni (XVI-XX secolo)*, Turin, Zamorani, 1997, pp. 203 and 209. Regarding Elia Samuele Artom, see also in the portal the entry by Alberto Legnaioli, *Elia Samuele Artom*. Giulia Cassuto was very active in the field of children's publishing, publishing among others *Primavera ebraica*, Florence, Casa Editrice Israel, 1931, a «reading book» intended «for our little readers» as an introduction to Jewish culture and tradition. She was also a member of the executive committee of the Opera pro-infanzia israelitica in Florence. See Juri Meda, *Cassuto Artom Giulia*, in *Dizionario biografico dell'educazione 1800-2000* <<http://dbe.editricebibliografica.it/>> (accessed 8 March 2022).

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was invited there to take the post of rabbi². On the evening of 14 May 1922, while her father was at the synagogue, the child died «gently and peacefully»³.

The Artom family returned to Italy the following year. Shortly afterwards the father was invited to Florence as chief rabbi and young Emanuele was able to undertake his studies at the Rabbinical College, moved there by Samuel Hirsch Margulies (1858-1922) at the beginning of the century, in which both his father Elia and his uncle Umberto Cassuto also taught. In 1933 Emanuele obtained the award of *Maskil* on completing the first course of studies⁴. In the autumn of the same year he again followed his father, who had been invited by the Foreign Ministry to teach Italian in Jewish middle schools in Mandatory Palestine. He embarked at Trieste in October 1933⁵ and once he had arrived in Tel Aviv he continued his studies, attending, among others, the lectures of Simcha Assaf (1889-1953), a professor and member of the Executive Commission of the Hebrew University – later rector from 1948 to 1950 and member of the Supreme Court of the State of Israel⁶. Emanuele returned to Italy in the summer of 1934. The following year Elia was called back to Rome to teach at the Italian Rabbinical College, moved there from Florence at the end of 1933⁷. Emanuele was thus able to resume his rabbinical studies, undertaking the higher course which earned him the rabbinical degree, with the title of *Chakham ha-Shalem* in 1937. At the same time he also obtained a

² 11 August 1920. CAHJP, *Archivio della famiglia Artom*, P171, b. 23, «Notizie sull'operosità scientifica e la carriera didattica di Elia Samuel Artom», Alessandria, 20 April 1926, a document which Elia attached to his application for qualification as *libero docente*.

³ These are the words written by her mother, Giulia Cassuto, quoted in E. Rossi Artom, *Gli Artom*, cit., p. 203.

⁴ Angelo M. Piattelli, *Artom, Menachem Emanuele*, in Id., *Repertorio biografico dei rabbini italiani dal 1861 al 2015*, 2nd ed. revised and updated (1st ed. 2010) <<http://www.archivio-torah.it>> (accessed 12 March 2022); Riccardo Di Segni, *I programmi di studio della scuola rabbinica italiana (1829-1999)*, «La Rassegna mensile di Israel», 65, 3, 1999, p. 16 fn. 2 and p. 23.

⁵ *Discorso di congedo del Rabbino Capo*, «Israel», XIX, 2, 4 October 1933, p. 8; A. Legnaioli, *Elia Samuele Artom*, cit., p. 5.

⁶ CAHJP, *Archivio della famiglia Artom*, P171, b. 25, draft of a letter from Elia S. Artom to Simcha Assaf, n.p., no date (in Hebrew). On Assaf see Moshe Nahum Zobel, *Assaf (Osofsky), Simcha*, in F. Skolnik, M. Berenbaum (eds.), *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd ed., vol. 2, Detroit, MacMillan Reference USA, Keter Publishing House, 2007, pp. 594-595.

⁷ A. Legnaioli, *Elia Samuele Artom*, cit., p. 6.

degree in humanities⁸.

A promising career... somewhere else

As soon as he had graduated, Artom was invited to take up the post of rabbi in Perugia from 6 December 1937, a branch whose management was assigned to the Jewish Community of Rome. He stayed there for a year, then the axe of racial legislation struck the town, and life for Emanuele, little more than twenty years old, drastically changed direction⁹. The gradual and rapid closing of social and civic horizons came on top of another family tragedy: two years earlier, on 11 January 1936, his mother Giulia had passed away¹⁰.

His father Elia decided to make *'aliyyà*, in accordance with the Zionist ideal he had received from his master Margulies and had shared with his wife, which both parents had been able to pass on to their son Emanuele¹¹. That the choice of Eretz Israel was neither random nor dictated by circumstances was made clear by Elia himself years later in a letter he sent to the president of the Jewish Community of Florence, Alfredo Orviato.

[...] I must state at the outset that when, ten years ago, I quit my office as a teacher in the Italian Rabbinical College and Italy, I did so with the firm intention of settling permanently in Erez Israel, and not that of escaping the difficulties of the moment to return eventually, at a more opportune time, to the country where I was born and where I had carried out most of my business.

This intention has been confirmed and reinforced in recent years, all the more so since today, as a teacher in Jewish high schools, I exercise there a function that is not entirely useless, and what little of my family remains to me is living there, after my many misfortunes, which are well

⁸ A.M. Piattelli, *Artom, Menachem Emanuele*, cit.; R. Di Segni, *I programmi*, cit., p. 16 fn. 2; E. Rossi Artom, *Gli Artom*, cit., p. 209.

⁹ Ibid.; A.M. Piattelli, *Artom, Menachem Emanuele*, cit.; Sergio Josef Sierra, *Menachem Emanuele Artom*, «La Rassegna mensile di Israel», 59, 1-2, 1993, p. 2.

¹⁰ CAHJP, *Archivio della famiglia Artom*, P171, b. 25, letter from E.S. Artom to the 'Aliyya Department of the Jewish Agency, n.p., 14 January 1944 (in Hebrew); E. Rossi Artom, *Gli Artom*, cit., p. 209.

¹¹ On Margulies see 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. In her *Primavera ebraica*, cit., pp. 53-61, Giulia Cassuto dedicated a section specifically to the Zionist movement and its founder, Theodor Herzl.

known to you¹².

Moreover, as early as the occasion of the mission to Tel Aviv in 1933-34, the Artom family had had the opportunity to weave a network of contacts which in these circumstances proved to be crucial¹³.

Elia and little Ruben left and arrived in Haifa on 13 September 1939. David had been in Palestine since the year before: he was working as a farmer in the Rodges kibbutz, near Petah Tikvah. Meir remained in the *hakhshara* in Cevoli, at the Villa Racah, waiting to receive his immigration certificate¹⁴. Emanuele stayed in Italy, where the transfer and transport of family property was still to be organized¹⁵. His father Elia, meanwhile, had managed to get him a certificate through the Hebrew University. On 26 October 1939, the University informed him that «the immigration certificate [*te'udat ha'aliyyà*] n. 125403 had been sent to its destination three weeks ago, for Mr. Emanuele Artom». With this document Emanuele was able to reach his family on 14 December¹⁶.

Difficult months...

On arrival he found a prostrate land. Finding a job was not easy and competition was fierce. For a short time he worked as a farmer in Moshava Magdiel, then looked for employment in education.

In June 1940 Emanuele presented «an official application to the *misrad ha-*

¹² CAHJP, *Archivio della famiglia Artom*, P171, b. 50, draft of a letter from E.S. Artom to A. Orvieto, Turin, 20 July 1949.

¹³ A. Legnaioli, *Elia Samuele Artom*, cit., pp. 5 and 9-11. Simcha Assaf himself took an interest in Emanuele, probably with regard to finding the immigration certificate, which the Hebrew University then sent him: cf. CAHJP, *Archivio della famiglia Artom*, P171, b. 25, draft of a letter from E.S. Artom to Simcha Assaf, cit. (in Hebrew); see further, *infra*, p. 9 and fn. 16.

¹⁴ CAHU, f. «Yo'el Rakach» [Giulio Racah], *Israel's «Father of Nuclear Physics». Joel Racah Turns Fifty*, n.p., n.d., but not before 1959. On Meir Artom, CAHJP, *Archivio della famiglia Artom*, P171, b. 25, draft of a letter from E.S. Artom to the Irgun 'Ole Italia, n.p., 12 February 1940.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, *Certificate of Origin and Interest*, Florence, 5 December 1939. The subsequent transfer from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem was made possible by the assistance provided by the Irgun 'Ole Italia; cf. *ibid.*, letter from the Irgun 'Ole Italia to E.S. Artom, Tel Aviv, 10 January 1940.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, postcard from the Hebrew University, teaching secretary to E.S. Artom, Jerusalem, 26 October 1939 (in Hebrew); letter from E.S. Artom to the 'Aliyya Department of the Jewish Agency, n.p., 14 January 1944 (in Hebrew); E. Rossi Artom, *Gli Artom*, cit., p. 209.

mefakkechim [the Office of the Superintendency] in Tel Aviv to have a teaching position in the *va'ad le'umi* [Jewish National Council] schools for the next year»¹⁷. In 1942 he moved to Magdiel to teach Latin and Greek, while in 1944 he was at the Mizrahi high school in 'Afula¹⁸.

Circumstances were made even more difficult by family events: a few weeks before Emanuele's arrival in Palestine, his brother David had been struck by meningitis at the age of 21 and died on 23 November 1939. With Meir unable to leave due to the outbreak of hostilities between Italy and the United Kingdom, only Elia and Emanuele remained able to guarantee support for the family, in particular for little Ruben, who had been enrolled in the Mikveh Israel agricultural school¹⁹.

Unfortunately, their sufferings could not be said to be over. After the war years, which his father, forced to hide to evade Fascist and Nazi persecution, had spent in constant but unsuccessful attempts to get news of his son and to be reunited with the rest of his family, Meir was finally able to embark at Taranto on 22 March 1945 with his future wife, Miriam Campagnano. The couple married on 6 June 1947 in Jerusalem. However, only a few months passed before Meir fell ill and died at the age of 26: it was 21 October 1947.

Just 5 months later, young Ruben fell at the age of twenty on the battlefield near Motza, during the war of independence.

The *'italkim* and the Italian rite temple in Jerusalem

Between 1938 and 1939, Italian Jewish immigration to Mandatory Palestine had seen a significant increase. Thus was formed the nucleus of the future Italian community in Eretz Israel. This community decided to organize itself in Irgun 'Olè Italia, which from 19 March 1939 devoted itself to assisting Jews

¹⁷ CAHJP, *Archivio della famiglia Artom*, P171, b. 25, letter from E.S. Artom to David Prato, n.p., 24 June 1940.

¹⁸ Ibid., letter from E.S. Artom to the 'Aliyya Department of Jewish Agency, n.p., 14 January 1944 (in Hebrew).

¹⁹ Ibid.

who came from the «*bel paese*» to Tel Aviv²⁰.

The organization did not meet with the approval of the more orthodox group – led by Alfonso Pacifici – who tried to create a new meeting centre in Jerusalem. These included the Artoms, and it was Emanuele himself, together with Giorgio Pirani (later Moshè ha-Cohen Pirani), who organized the first prayers celebrated according to the Italian rite in September 1940. The rite was so successful that Elia S. Artom, Pacifici and Renato Jarach immediately proposed repeating the prayers every Saturday and on feast days. Thus was born the Italian Jerusalem community, whose spiritual guidance was officially entrusted to the father, Elia, in 1942, when he was appointed rabbi of the Italian temple, a post he held until 1952, when he was appointed to the «Samuel H. Margulies» school in Turin²¹.

For his part, Emanuele was the chief mover, with Giorgio Pirani, in the establishment of the *Hevrat Yehudè Italia lifulà ruchanit* (Association of Italian Jews for spiritual activity), which was to take care of encouraging and promoting the cultural life of the Italian community in Jerusalem. An initial keynote meeting was held on 11 December 1944. The association then acquired a statute in 1946²².

Rabbinical activity in Italy

From 1945 to 1973 he obtained a job as manager and editor of the publications issued by the the Israeli state's Directorate General for Personnel. In the 1950s he took part in the mission to Italy for the Cultural Department of the Zionist Federation²³. But his contacts with his homeland

²⁰ A.M. Piattelli, *La sinagoga di rito italiano e la Hevrat Yehudè Italia lifulà ruhanit a Gerusalemme (1940-1952)*, «La Rassegna mensile di Israel», 80, 2-3, 2014, pp. 115-116.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 117-123.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 126-128; CAHJP, *Archivio della famiglia Artom*, P171, b. 56, «B. h. k. kefi minhag bene romi; chevrat yehude 'italia lif'ula ruchanit» [The Italian rite temple: Association of Italian Jews for spiritual activity].

²³ *Ibid.*, b. 102, «Missione in Italia per il Dipartimento culturale della Federazione sionistica», 1955-59. Probably the same *shelichut* (mission) on behalf of the Jewish Agency cited in S.J. Sierra, *Menachem Emanuele Artom*, cit., p. 1, although it quotes an erroneous date («1936»).

were destined to be strengthened, and led Artom to reside for long periods in Italy. In 1973 he was called to the post of rabbi in Venice, a position he held for the next three years. At the same time he was a reader of modern Hebrew at the Ca' Foscari University. Later, between 1985 and 1987, he succeeded Sergio Sierra as leader of the Jewish Community in Turin, where he poured out his energies in support of the «Samuel H. Margulies» School. Furthermore, during his long Italian stays he also carried out teaching activities at the Italian Rabbinical College in Rome²⁴.

Emanuele Artom's contribution was fundamental both for the formation of the *'italkim* community in Jerusalem and for the spiritual rebirth of Judaism in Italy. In the last years of his life he returned to Israel, where he died on 19 July 1992. He left behind his wife, Elena Lea Rossi, whom he had married on 30 June 1942, and their four children²⁵.

Principal publications

- *Geografia dello Stato d'Israele. Appunti*, Rome, Federazione sionistica italiana, 1957.
- *Vocabolario ebraico-italiano. In appendice: vocabolario aramaico biblico-italiano*, Rome, Fondazione per la gioventù ebraica, 1965.
- With Dario Disegni, Alfredo Toaff, Ermanno Friedenthal (eds.), *La Bibbia ebraica*, vol. 4, *Agiografi*, Turin, Mariotti, 1967.
- *Corso pratico di morfologia ebraica con elementi di fonetica e di sintassi ed esercizi*, Rome, Unione delle Comunità israelitiche italiane, 1975.
- *Il libro del popolo. Introduzione alla lettura della Bibbia*, Rome, Carucci,

²⁴ Ibid., p. 2; E. Rossi Artom, *Gli Artom*, cit., pp. 154 and 209; A.M. Piattelli, *Artom, Menachem Emanuele*, cit.

²⁵ Elena belongs to the Ancona branch of one of the most ancient Italian Jewish families, the (de') Rossi, which according to tradition was deported to Rome by Titus after the conquest of Jerusalem. Elena arrived in Tel Aviv with her parents and sisters on 14 October 1939. E. Rossi Artom, *La famiglia de' Rossi. Vicissitudini di una famiglia ebraica da Gerusalemme a Roma e da Roma nel mondo*, Firenze, Giuntina, 2013, pp. 47, 262-263. The historical research she has conducted on the Artom family and cited several times have ensured that the memory and legacy of this family continues today.

1980.

- Mosé Maimonide, *Il libro dei precetti*, introduction, translation from Hebrew, notes by Menachem Emanuele Artom, Rome, Carucci, 1980.
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- Umberto Fortis, Elena Rossi Artom, Ariel Viterbo (eds.), *Vita di Jehudà. Autobiografia di Leon Modena rabbino veneziano del XVII secolo*, traduzione di Emanuele Menachem Artom, Turin, Silvio Zamorani, 2000 [posthumous].

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- Gabriele Rigano, *Note sui rabbini in Italia dalle leggi razziste alla liberazione*, «Zakhor. Rivista di storia degli ebrei in Italia», IX, 2006, pp. 143-182.
- Sergio Josef Sierra, *Menachem Emanuele Artom*, «La Rassegna mensile di

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