

Enzo (Joseph) Bonaventura

[Go to personal file](#)

Thanks to the Zionist network, to his own professional merits and in the face of numerous hardships, Enzo Bonaventura managed to achieve the academic goals at the Hebrew University that he had been unjustly denied in Italy, in a culturally hostile environment. He acquired additional competences abroad, measuring himself against others in a high-level international context. His return to Italy would have been not only an act of justice, it would also have benefited the university and his discipline. The prevailing attitude in the academic environment, however, was not conducive to this outcome. After his tragic death, moreover, it was even suggested that he had received help.

[Link to other connected Lives on the move:](#)

[Daniel Asheri](#)
[David Asheri](#)
[Umberto Cassuto](#)
[Anna Di Gioacchino Cassuto](#)
[Federigo Enriquez](#)
[Attilio Momigliano](#)
[Alfonso Pacifici](#)
[Matilde Passigli Bonaventura](#)
[Giulio Racah](#)
[Gaetano Salvemini](#)

Education and precariousness

Enzo Bonaventura was born in Pisa on 24 December 1891 to Emma Fano and Arnaldo Bonaventura (b. Livorno, 28 July 1862, d. Florence, 7 October 1952), who was a musicologist, violinist, and journalist. Enzo completed high school in Florence at the Liceo classico Galileo, where he graduated with honors in 1909 and studied at the Istituto di studi superiori pratici e di perfezionamento (from 1924-25 the Regia Università) where he earned a degree in philosophy, in 1913, and completed specialization in psychology, in 1914. He graduated with honors and both theses were published¹. He stated that he chose that degree course in order to dedicate himself to experimental psychology. Indeed, the Sezione di filosofia in Florence could claim not only to have established in 1903-04 a chair (as in Turin, Rome and Naples from 1905) but also an Istituto e laboratorio di psicologia, directed by

¹ *Notizie sulla operosità scientifica e sulla carriera didattica del Prof. Enzo Bonaventura*, n.d. but 1930; typewritten by himself for a university competition in 1930 (see below), copy in private papers of the Bonaventura family. See also ASUFi, AC, SS, f. «Bonaventura Enzo». The thesis was published by Florentine Istituto, Enzo Bonaventura, *Le qualità del mondo fisico: studi di filosofia naturale*, Florence, Galletti & Cocci, 1916.

Francesco De Sarlo, professor of Filosofia teoretica and trained medical psychiatrist². Bonaventura had also taken exams in the physiology of the nervous system and anthropology (in the program for his degree) and also followed courses in medicine³. He was appointed laboratory assistant by the Facoltà, appointment confirmed by a RD (royal decree) on 16 May 1915. He was conferred *libera docenza* (qualification for teaching at the university) in psychology by ministerial decree on 30 May 1917 (confirmed only in 1929), while he was on leave during the war, where he distinguished himself from March 1916 to May 1919⁴. He began teaching as *professore incaricato* (adjunct professor) in Psicologia sperimentale, in November 1923, also performing the role of director of the Istituto di psicologia in the place of the professor (his mentor), who had been moved to the teaching of philosophy. What had happened?

Antifascism, afascism, Zionism

The minister Gentile had removed De Sarlo from the Istituto di psicologia due to his antifascist and anti-neoidealist positions, as the archival records show⁵. The issue was silenced: The Sezione di Filosofia (subsequently Facoltà di Lettere), after an initial protest, obeyed and placed the discipline on the shoulders of Bonaventura, who had only annual, renewable contracts and no academic power. Bonaventura accepted, and he also agreed to reorganize the Società italiana di psicologia, which De Sarlo, the president, had been forced to leave, in total silence.

In 1925 the growing violence in the city began to be felt in the university as well, and in the Facoltà: Gaetano Salvemini was arrested for his «Non

² Patrizia Guarnieri, *Senza cattedra. L'Istituto di Psicologia dell'Università di Firenze tra idealismo e fascismo*, Florence, FUP, 2012.

³ He stressed this twofold academic background, philosophy and medicine, in his CVs in the 1930s, both in *Notizie sulla operosità scientifica*, cit. and in his CV for the Hebrew University.

⁴ ASUFI, AC, SLD, f. «Bonaventura Ezio [sic]».

⁵ For a detailed reconstruction of the events, which had been entirely ignored, see P. Guarnieri, *Senza cattedra*, cit. pp. 71-103.

mollare» («Don't give up»); De Sarlo was suspended due to his incompatibility with the directives of the regime; Bonaventura himself was forced to abandon the classroom as students were calling out «Jew, Jew»⁶. Bonaventura's conference, concerning Palestine, was the last one at the Circolo di Cultura founded by the Rosselli brothers and by Calamandrei, before the fascists devastated it on 31 December 1924⁷.

It was well known that Bonaventura, along with Alfonso Pacifici, was among the most active Zionists in the group led by the rabbi Samuel H. Margulies, who from Florence fostered a reawakening of Italian Judaism. Zionism was looked upon as intrinsically suspicious, as antinational. Nonetheless, Bonaventura did not share the antifascist convictions of his mentor, of Ludovico Limentani, and of others of the institute. He did not sign Croce's manifesto and he collaborated with the Istituto fascista di cultura. Like almost everyone else he swore the Oath of Allegiance, on 30 November 1931, and received his membership card on 29 October 1932⁸.

Ruined... and immediately replaced

With a letter dated 22 November 1938 he was removed from service «on the basis of the R.d.I. of 17 November 1938, XVII, n. 1728».

Bonaventura appealed to the rector, Arrigo Serpieri. Those measures «totally ruined him, depriving him of all the work that allowed him to support his family [...] wounded in the head on the plateau of Asiago (November 1917), a member of the P.N.F., the undersigned requests that his very particular position be considered with equity»⁹.

There were 39 faculty members removed from the university in Florence,

⁶ The reference is to 1925 and is recorded by a then-student who had come from Palestine, Jacob Tsur, *Sunrise in Zion*, London, Allen & Unwin, 1968, p. 129.

⁷ Cf. Patrizia Guarnieri, *Italian Psychology and Jewish Emigration under Fascism*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, pp. 118-119.

⁸ Copies of these documents in ASUFI, AC, SLD, f. «Bonaventura Ezio [sic]».

⁹ See Paolo Marrassini, *Una Facoltà improduttiva: Lettere fra cultura e politica*, in *L'Università degli studi di Firenze 1924-2004*, vol. 1, Florence, Olschki, 2004, pp. 49-164, esp. pp. 80-90; the quote from Bonaventura here on p. 87.

including five full professors (Momigliano and Limentani from his Facoltà)¹⁰. What Bonaventura obtained was recognition from the Direzione generale per la demografia e la razza (High Council for Demography and Race) for his merits in war¹¹. From the rector of the university he received the written order to hand in the keys to the Istituto within two days¹², while at the faculty meeting on 27 October 1938 the dean Mario Salmi announced that there were three candidates for the position of acting director of the Gabinetto di psicologia sperimentale. The position was conferred to the candidate Alberto Marzi, not the one with the best credentials, 31 years of age, member of the P.N.F. since 1928 and *libero docente* (qualified university teacher) in Bologna since 1936¹³. From 1930 he was voluntary assistant under Bonaventura, who, after the events of 1938, did not speak to him for many years.

Trusting in the help of Chaim Weizmann

From the beginning of October 1938 Bonaventura – now 47 with dependent wife and three children – began searching for a solution abroad. «I would be honored to be able to teach in Jerusalem, as I have always loved the land of our forefathers», he wrote to the rector of the Hebrew University on 7 October 1938¹⁴. His aim was to move to Palestine, where he had important contacts:

As you know, in consequences of the recent ordinance all the Jewish professors have been excluded from the University and schools. Consequently, I have lost my chair as Professor of Psychology, which I

10 Francesca Cavarocchi, Alessandra Minerbi, *Politica razziale e persecuzione antiebraica nell'ateneo fiorentino*, in Enzo Collotti (ed.), *Razza e fascismo. La persecuzione contro gli ebrei in Toscana 1938-1943*, Rome, Carocci, 1999, pp. 467-510.

11 ACS, MI, DGDR, *Divisione razza, Fascicoli personale (1938-1944)*, f. «Bonaventura Enzo». The folder is empty but on the cover are the words «discriminato» (discriminated) and the motivation «Croce M.C.», i.e. for merit in war.

12 ASUFI, AC, 1938, b. 17/E, hand-delivered registered letter from the rector A. Serpieri to A. Bonaventura, 13 October 1938.

13 BUF, LF, Verbal adunanze, 27 October 1938. See ACS, MPI, DGIS, Divisione I, Liberi docenti, s. 3 (1930-1950), b. 3f. «Marzi Alberto»; Marzi completed qualification for university teaching (*libera docenza*) in Bologna since after the expulsion from Psicologia of the full professor Francesco De Sarlo it was no longer possible to obtain qualifications in Florence.

14 Letter from E. Bonaventura to the rector of the HU, 7 October 1938 (in French), in Simonetta Gori Savellini, *Enzo Bonaventura dalla psicologia sperimentale alla psicologia pedagogica*, in «Bollettino di psicologia applicata», 182-183, 1987, p. 42.

have held for fifteen years at the University in Florence [...]. I am in the little group of Italian intellectuals Hebrews which feel the charm of Zionist ideas: from twenty years I have offered my activities in service of our cause and for any years I was Vice-President of the Italian Zionist Federation. It has always been my deep desire to give my scientific and professional activities to the University of Jerusalem and to educate my three children in Eretz Israel [*sic*].¹⁵

This is what he wrote to Chaim Weizmann, in London, recently re-elected president of the World Zionist Organization. Actually Bonaventura had been an adjunct professor (*professore incaricato*) and had never had a chair, although in 1931 he had reached second place in the national competition organized by the Università di Roma and could have been called to Florence or elsewhere, like Cesare Musatti, who came in third. Bonaventura understandably glossed over this injustice, injustice both toward himself and toward his discipline, although well known in Italian academic circles, in his communication with interlocutors abroad. Weizmann replied that, while he was no expert in the field, he «had told some of the leading personalities of the [Hebrew] University who are now in London that they should do everything in their power to get [...] such an outstanding and highly esteemed scholar as yourself»¹⁶. In the meantime, the administrator of the Hebrew University, Werner Senator, met him in Italy and was «favorably impressed»¹⁷.

15 Ibid., p. 43, letter from E. Bonaventura to C. Weizmann, 8 November 1938 (in English), reproduced without any archival reference.

16 Copy of letter from C. Weizmann to E. Bonaventura, 20 November 1938, made available to the author by the son Daniel Asheri, 11 June 2016.

17 CAHU, f. 2278, «Bonaventura E.J.»; see Kurt Loewenstein, *Senator, David Werner*, in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, ed. by Michael Berenbaum, Fred Skolnik, 2nd ed., vol. 18, Detroit, Thomson Gale, 2007, p. 287.

Evidence in London, New York and with the APA

Given the delay with which Weizmann replied, for which he apologized, on 15 November Bonaventura turned to the Society for Protection of Science and Learning in London¹⁸. At the beginning of December he filled out the relative questionnaire. He certainly preferred Palestine, although, excluding countries which were too hot or too cold, he was willing to go to Egypt, Great Britain, the British territories, the United States, south America, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, etc., in other words to any country which offered opportunities of «occupation suitable to my special scientific competency [sic]». In the CV he attached to his application he had been for fifteen years «professor of psychology of the evolutive age»; an informer of the SPSL, however, noted that he had been only an «incaricato (a.o. Prof.)» (adjunct professor). Before losing his job he earned 36,000 lire a year, including earnings from teaching outside the university. His pension income would have come to about 5,400 a year. He described himself as an expert in childhood, while in Italy he was known as an expert in experimental psychology and, at the time, psychotechnics. He spoke French, Spanish and Italian fluently. He could read German and to some extent English. Among his referees he listed four renowned psychologists from abroad: Edouard Claparède in Geneva, David Katz in Stockholm, Henri Wallon in Paris, Cyril Burt in London and two Italian professors, Giovanni Calò, educationalist at his own Facoltà in Florence and father Agostino Gemelli from the Cattolica in Milan, the only one for whom he failed to provide an address¹⁹.

Three days later, the secretary of the SPSL thanked Bonaventura for his application with the usual reply: «we shall do our best to help you to find a suitable position. We would however advice you to get into touch with any

¹⁸ BLO, MS, SPSL, b. 471/3, f. «Bonaventura Enzo», 1938-48. For further details see Patrizia Guarnieri, *The Zionist Network and Enzo Bonaventura: from Florence to Jerusalem*, in Ead., *Italian Psychology cit.*, pp. 113-153 e pp. 213-221.

¹⁹ BLO, MS, SPSL, b. 471/3, f. «Bonaventura Enzo», 1938-48, «General information», 12 December 1938.

contacts you may have in U.S.A., as the prospects in that country are now better than in Europe»²⁰.

By way of the SPSL his case was raised with the Committee on Displaced Scholars of the American Psychological Society, established in September 1938, which added his to a list of over one hundred names sent to the Emergency Committee in Aid of Displaced Foreign Scholars in New York. The Committee created a dossier for him in 1939, one of many. Bonaventura, however, never contacted the American organizations.

Candidates at the Hebrew University

The Hebrew University had been looking for a professor of psychology for several years. In 1933 it offered the position to the esteemed scholar Kurt Lewin, who however asked for a salary beyond the means of the university and therefore chose to remain in the United States, where he had emigrated. Shortly thereafter an application was received from Max Eitingon, director of the Berliner Psychoanalytisches Institut, who had already come to Palestine. But the Hebrew University was looking for something different, to the great disappointment of Sigmund Freud, who had recommended him warmly²¹. It was the authoritative psychologist David Katz who proposed Bonaventura, who had also published a book entitled *La psicoanalisi* in the year 1938²². He was recommended to Weizmann by Cecil Roth, in November 1938, and two distinguished Italian scholars, Zionists and obviously expelled: Federigo Enriques and Tullio Levi Civita, mathematicians like the rector of the Hebrew University, the German Abraham Fränkel who had emigrated to Palestine in

20 Ivi, letter from E. Simpson to E. Bonaventura, 15 December 1938.

21 See David Bargal, *Kurt Lewin and the First Attempts to Establish a Department of Psychology at the Hebrew University*, «Minerva», 36, 1998, pp. 49-68, and Milton Rosenbaum, *Freud-Eitingon-Magnes Correspondence: Psychoanalysis at the Hebrew University*, «Journal of the American Analytical Association», 2, 2, 1954, pp. 311-317.

22 Enzo Bonaventura, *La psicoanalisi*, Milan, Mondadori, 1938, reprinted twice in the space of one month. This publication is the basis of the recent re-edition ed. by David Meghnagi, Venice, Marsilio, 2017. There is an important reprint edited by Alberto Marzi, Milan, Mondadori, 1950, with a posthumous preface by Bonaventura.

1933²³. All the documentation, including the recommendations, was examined by an ad hoc commission of the Hebrew University, which formulated its evaluation of the candidate²⁴. The commission included the president Alexander Dushkin, Cecil Roth, from Oxford, the educationalist Chaim Aron Kaplan and the professor of social philosophy Martin Buber, who knew Italian and read Bonaventura's publications and reported on them to his colleagues.

The detailed assessment of the candidate was positive in terms of his academic qualifications. It was recognized that he had acquired significant skills and practical experience in developmental psychology in Florence, at the Istituto toscano Umberto I per bambini tardivi (retarded children) and in the Scuola magistrale ortofrenica per i maestri speciali²⁵. What is more: «Prof. Bonaventura is integrated and well known in Italian Jewish circles. He has been a Zionist for many years and it appears that he knows some Hebrew, which would make it possible for him to teach in the language relatively soon»²⁶.

On 18 January the commission recommended his nomination to the rector. First, however, they wanted to meet him personally at the Hebrew University.

Professors «willing to accept smaller salaries»

Bonaventura had already been to Palestine on a trip organized by the Federazione sionistica italiana with Alfonso Pacifici, who had moved there in

23 Letter from Federico Enriques to Abraham Fränkel, 11 November 1938, reported partially in S. Gori Savellini, *Enzo Bonaventura*, cit. p. 43.

24 Cf. HUCA, Hebrew University Executive Committee Minutes, 27 April 1939, par. 4, extract in f. 2278, A.M. Dushkin, letter to rector A. Fränkel, 27 April 1939.

25 Patrizia Guarnieri, Matteo Fiorani, *Scuola magistrale ortofrenica di Firenze, in lid., Fuori dal manicomio. Gli archivi della salute mentale dall'Unità alla legge 180*, DOI: <<http://dx.medra.org/10.19200/ORTOFRENICA>> (accessed 25 April 2019) and lid., *Istituto Umberto I di Firenze*, ivi DOI:<<http://dx.medra.org/10.19200/UMBERTO>> (accessed 25 April 2019).

26 HUCA, f. 2278, «Bonaventura E.J.», commission report to the rector A.H. Fränkel, 27 April 1939, trans. by Odelia Liberanome, in S. Gori Savellini, *Enzo Bonaventura*, cit., pp. 48-49.

1935²⁷. He had gone there with Matilde, in 1924, three years after they were married. Now, if everything went according to plans, she would join him in Jerusalem with the children: Davide (14), Emanuel (11) and Daniel (3), who for the time being stayed in Florence.

He left Italy in March 1939. After several meetings with the commission, on 9 April he received the *ad personam* appointment as professor of psychology at the Hebrew University, formally effective beginning in August. The contract was for two years and the salary 400 LP, the norm for academic refugees in Jerusalem (the rector received 550 LP). There was no funding for research or for a laboratory, at least initially²⁸.

Resources were limited. After the war broke out, the Hebrew University lost circa 200,000 dollars, almost half the budget, compared to the revenues it had received previously from European countries. In all there were «fifty two refugee professors and assistants [...], most of them distinguished scientists and scholars. These men are willing to accept smaller salaries and subject themselves to other inconveniences in order that they might continue to make their contribution to scholarship and science»²⁹. The American Friends of the Hebrew University, via the chairman Edward M.M. Warburg, asked the ECADFS for a contribution of \$12,500 for the academic year 1940-1941. The sum was needed to pay the salaries of some of their teachers; the Emergency Committee of New York decided which.

The psychologist Enzo Joseph Bonaventura, whose contract expired on 30 September 1941, figured, along with two other Italians – the physicist Giulio Racah and the scholar of Bible Umberto Cassuto – among the five scholar

27 CAHIP, P172, Archivio Alfonso Pacifici, f. 177, «Viaggio in Erez Israel» (with photographs), 1924 (see <<http://cahjp.nli.org.il>>, accessed 10 May 2019).

28 Letter from D.W. Senator to E. Bonaventura, 9 October 1939, courtesy of Odella Libermanome (her translation from the Hebrew in 1987).

29 NYPL, MAD, ECADFS, s.l, b. 4, f. 1, «Bonaventura Enzo», copy of letter from Edward M.M. Warburg, chairman of the Executive Committee of the AFHU at the ECADFS, 25 March 1941. See Eva Talkes-Klein, *L'université hébraïque de Jérusalem à travers ses acteurs. La première génération de professeurs (1925-1948)*, Paris, Honoré Champion, 2004, pp. 151-154, and Haim Ormian, *Bonaventura, Enzo Joseph*, in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, ed. Michael Berenbaum, Fred Skolnik, 2nd ed., vol. 4, Detroit, Thomas Gale, 2007, p. 56.

chosen by the ECADFS, which then provided funding until 1943-44³⁰. And then?

Projects and outcomes

In a community in large part composed of recent immigrants like the Jewish community in Palestine, the teaching of psychology was essential, the Hebrew University explained to the SPSL in London, which had requested updated information about Bonaventura³¹. His project was aimed at studying the cultural and psychological differences among the young people that were living in the land of Israel with the purpose of determining what educational programs would be the most appropriate. He managed to set up initially a relatively modest laboratory of psychology, subsequently a degree program and finally a department of psychology, of which he was the head. In the space of two years, the number of students enrolled doubled, partly due to the fact that in 1942 psychologists achieved autonomous professional status³². After little more than two years, the professor began to publish again, in Hebrew. He developed a completely different approach: «based on justice, on helping each other, on equal rights [...]. Each individual must work for the good of society [...] society must assure the individual the possibility to enjoy life». Children were to come first³³.

In the event one considered returning

What was to happen, however, was up in the air. In the academic year 1943-44 the ECADFS funding for salaries at the Hebrew University was cut; on the

30 NYPL, MAD, ECADFS, s.l, b. 4, f. 1, «Bonaventura Enzo», also the deposit slips from B. Drury, 19 and 26 October 1943 and 14 and 26 January 1944.

31 BLO, MS, SPSL, b. 471/3, f. «Bonaventura Enzo», 1938-48, extract from letter from David W. Senator to the SPSL, 30 May 1940.

32 HUCA, f. 2278, «Bonaventura E.J.», various documents in Hebrew on projects and activities carried out, I «Research Proposal», n.d. but 1939, to «Report», 1947.

33 Enzo Bonaventura, *The Process of Learning in the Kindergarten Years*, «Hed-Hagan», 9, 1944, pp. 5-11: 11 (in Hebrew), It. trans. *Il processo di apprendimento nell'età del giardino di infanzia*, «Età evolutiva», 9, 1989, pp. 5-12.

other hand in February 1944 measures were passed for the reintegration of those who had been expelled. Everyone was talking about them. «We have heard that Prof. Bonaventura is doing quite well, but we do not know whether he intends to return to Italy on a stable basis»³⁴. This is how Alberto Marzi replied to whoever asked him. In November 1945 he received a letter from his former mentor, after a long silence.

It took Marzi almost a month to answer: «It's been exactly six years since we last corresponded: The last letter I have from you is dated December 1939. [...] you are right to want to be informed, and I will try to provide the information in broad terms»³⁵. Bonaventura was putting on the pressure; what he wanted to know was quite clear. «To respond to your queries [...] things are not going well for psychology [...] There is no talk of new positions in psychology at the university [...]. In short: life quite dark and horizons blocked [...] it is certain that no new university posts will be opened for the next twenty years, and certainly not for psychology».

This is what Marzi wrote in January 1946, although it was not true and he knew it³⁶. It was true, however, that the destiny of psychology, as he wrote, was still in the hands of the psychologist and rector of the Università Cattolica Agostino Gemelli.

Colleagues' hypocrisy and concerns

Gemelli also sought to find out about Bonaventura's plans. He first asked Marzi, then Bonaventura himself: «Do you intend to stay there, or are you thinking about coming back to us?»³⁷. In the field it was well known that he

³⁴ Private papers of the Marzi family, letter from A. Marzi to «Illustre e caro professore» [not identified], 17 December 1944.

³⁵ Ivi, A. Marzi's draft for «Carissimo Professore» [E. Bonaventura], 23 December 1945. The Marzi papers are not complete; currently missing are the letters from Bonaventura of December 1939 and November 1945. Thanks go to Carlo Alberto e Tessa Marzi for the possibility to consult the papers.

³⁶ Ivi, draft by A. Marzi to E. Bonaventura, 31 January 1946.

³⁷ AUC, CG, *Corrispondenza*, b.179, f. 309, sf. 2240, letter from A. Gemelli to E. Bonaventura, 3 April 1946. I thank Maurizio Romano of the AUC for information concerning the existence of the correspondence between the two.

would be arriving from Jerusalem between the end of September and the beginning of October 1946. It did not appear to be just for a visit: «allow me to express my satisfaction for your return to Florence. It is precisely what I hoped for. Italian psychology, which is rather languishing, can only benefit from this», his colleague Mario Canella had the nerve to write, an anti-Semite and firm supporter of «racial psychology». Having learned that Bonaventura was returning, he hastened to re-insert his name in the committee of the «Rivista di Psychologia» (from which it had been removed in 1939, although there had been no legal obligation) and to inform him of this, promising even to pay him a visit³⁸.

The much awaited competition for a chair in psychology was posted in 1947 and the commission had already «agreed on [...] the three possible candidates for the next competition», as Gemelli wrote³⁹. Bonaventura, by now professor at the Hebrew University, was not among the three, all of whom had less qualifications than he; he had also placed second in the previous competition, after Ponzo, who was given a chair. It would have been embarrassing, had he been a candidate. Father Gemelli, who was of course on the commission although elected with few votes, invited him to Milan on 16 December 1947 for a conference, but above all to speak to him in private⁴⁰.

We do not know what they said to each other, but Bonaventura went back to Jerusalem. Some candidates withdrew from the competition, perhaps Bonaventura, too, or perhaps he never presented himself, given the situation. The results, made public two months later, were as expected: Musatti, Banissoni and Marzi were shortlisted.

38 Bonaventura family papers, letter from Mario Canella to E. Bonaventura, 13 September 1946.

39 ASPI, Carte Gemelli, Corrispondenza, letter from A. Gemelli to C. Musatti, 29 April 1947.

40 AUC, CG, Corrispondenza, b. 197, f. 352, sf. 3552, letter from E. Bonaventura to A. Gemelli, 1 December 1947, and reply from A. Gemelli to E. Bonaventura, 2 December 1947.

Commemorations and «fake news»

He went back to going up and down Mount Scopus, where the department of psychology and the hospital were located. He was killed, along with 78 other people, including Anna Di Gioacchino, the widow of the rabbi Cassuto, on 13 April 1948, in the notorious Arab attack on the escorted convoys of doctors, nurses and teachers going to work in Hadassah.

Exactly one month later, the Facoltà di Lettere commemorated him. Giovanni Calò stressed that Bonaventura was «had been ready as soon as possible [...] to return in some capacity to that Facoltà where for so many years he had taught and directed the Istituto di Psicologia»⁴¹. Others came out with a defensive reconstruction of the facts, improbable but enduring. The dean Paolo Lamanna (a fascist likely to be purged) invented the story that the victims of the racial laws had in reality enjoyed widespread solidarity and observed that by leaving Bonaventura had achieved academic fulfillment. This was his compensation for the injustices suffered in the 1930-31 competition, added Marzi, overlooking those of 1938, and it was thanks to an international commission in Jerusalem that he was given a chair. Marzi pointed out that the members of the commission were «Péron, Katz, Myers, Claparède and Gemelli», the only Italian⁴².

The minutes of the Hebrew University report quite clearly, however, that the commissioners charged with assessment were Alexander Dushkin, Cecil Roth, Chaim Aron Kaplan and Martin Buber. None of those mentioned by Marzi had taken part in the commission nominated ad hoc by the university in Jerusalem to assign a two-year appointment in psychology (not a chair). Certainly not among them was Gemelli, who had always sought to discourage Bonaventura. There was no place for him in the university, he had told him in 1935, neither in Italy, nor abroad: «many German professors “guilty of being Jewish” has managed to grab posts in Europe and in America. [...] perhaps

41 Giovanni Calò, *Enzo Bonaventura*, «Rivista di Psicologia», 44, 1948, p. 99.

42 Alberto Marzi, *Enzo Bonaventura*, «Rivista di Psicologia», 44, 1948, pp. 102-112: 109.

Divine Providence deemed that he should forget teaching at a university»⁴³.

In an effort to conceal his declared antisemitism, in the post-war period Gemelli was wont to take credit for aiding a Jew who had actually sought his help but was no longer around to contradict him. Gemelli even expected gratitude for writing a letter of reference for him in reply to a request from professor Stephan Kraus, who was in reality himself a refugee in Jerusalem, young, unemployed and in competition with Bonaventura for the same post, so certainly not interested in a reference for his rival⁴⁴. In the «Archivio di psicologia» in 1948 it was Mario Ponzio, who supported Marzi in the competition in that same year, who rounded out the new version of the story about the deceased colleague: it was because of his faith that he had left and had died. He had left both Italy and the Istituto di psicologia, which he had directed until 1940⁴⁵ – as if he had not been forced out in 1938.

Nearly fifty years after the racial laws, at a conference dedicated to Bonaventura at the Istituto di psicologia in Florence, the story of the international commission with Gemelli as member, which was supposed to have assigned him a chair at the Hebrew University, was repeated with the same details, in good faith, drawing on the commemoration published in 1948⁴⁶.

In 2012 a room in the San Salvi Dipartimento di Psicologia in Florence was dedicated to Bonaventura, where some of the instruments from his laboratory of experimental psychology are on exhibit. In 2018 an interdepartmental conference was held on the 70th anniversary of his death.

43 Letters from E. Bonaventura to A. Gemelli, 15 December 1935, and A. Gemelli to E. Bonaventura, 24 October 1935, reproduced in part together with another, n.d., from A. Gemelli, in S. Gori Savellini, *Enzo Bonaventura*, cit., pp. 149 ff.

44 This was the Hungarian Stephan Krauss (1902-1973), son of the famous Talmudic scholar Samuel Krauss. On the telling misunderstandings that have surrounded these events over the years see P. Guarnieri, *Italian Psychology*, cit., pp. 149 ff.

45 Mario Ponzio, *Necrologio. Enzo Bonaventura*, «Archivio di psicologia», 9, 1948, pp. 207-211.

46 Contributions by Francesca Morino Abele and Virgilio Lazzeroni, in Simonetta Gori Savellini (ed.), *Una singolare vicenda culturale dalla psicologia sperimentale alla psicoanalisi e alla psicologia applicata. Atti del convegno di Firenze*, Firenze, Giunti, 1989, respectively p. 11 e p. 15; S. Gori Savellini, *Enzo Bonaventura*, cit., p. 42, also refers to Marzi.

In Jerusalem a street is named after him, in recognition of his martyrdom for freedom.

Major publications

- *Le qualità del mondo fisico: studi di filosofia naturale*, Florence, Galletti & Cocci, 1916.
- *Ricerche sperimentali sulle illusioni dell'introspezione*, «Psiche», 4, 1916, pp. 48-102, 138-186, 289-316.
- *Il problema psicologico del tempo*, Milan, Soc. Istituto editoriale scientifico, 1929.
- *Psicologia dell'età evolutiva. Infanzia e adolescenza*, Lanciano, Carabba, 1930; Spanish trans. Barcelona, Araluce, 1932).
- *Lo studio sperimentale del carattere del bambino lattante*, in *Atti del IV congresso nazionale di Nipiologia*, ed. by Ernesto Cacace, Varrallo-Sesia, Arti grafiche valesiane, 1935, pp. 209-227.
- *Risultati e tendenze attuali della psicologia del lattante*, «La Nipiologia», 33, 1937, pp. 3-16.
- *La psicoanalisi*, Milan, Mondadori, 1938, reprinted several times. New ed. with posthumous preface by the author, ed. by Alberto Marzi, Milan, Mondadori, 1950; Hebrew trans. by David Asheri, Jerusalem, The Hebrew University Magnes Press, 1952; most recent Italian edition ed. by David Meghnagi, Venice, Marsilio, 2017.
- *The Process of Learning in the Kindergarten Years*, «Hed-Hagan», 9, 1944, pp. 5-11 (in Hebrew); Italian trans. *Il processo di apprendimento nell'età del giardino di infanzia*, «Età evolutiva», 9, 1989, pp. 5-12.
- *Instructions for Teachers and Instructors in Professional Guidance for Young People*, Jerusalem, Center for Professional Guidance Levi D. Brandes, 1947 (in Hebrew); Italian trans. *Direttive per i maestri ed educatori all'orientamento professionale dei giovani*, ed. by Odelia Libermanome, Simonetta Gori Savellini, «Teorie e modelli», 3, 1988, pp.

37-59.

- *Indirizzi e ricerche recenti di psicologia sociale*, «Archivio di psicologia, neurologia e psichiatria», 9, 1948, pp. 121-137.

Archival sources

- ACS, MI, DGDR, *Divisione razza, Fascicoli personali (1938-44)*, f. «Bonaventura Enzo».
- ASUFI, AC, SS, f. «Bonaventura Enzo».
- ASUFI, AC, SLD, f. «Bonaventura Ezio [sic]».
- BLO, MS, SPSL, b. 471/3, f. «Bonaventura Enzo», 1938-48.
- CAHJP, P191/10, *Archivio Enzo Bonaventura e famiglia* <<http://cahjp.nli.org.il>>.
- AHU, f. 2278, «Bonaventura E.J.».
- Private papers of the Bonaventura Family.
- PL, MAD, ECADFS, s. I.A, b. 4, f. 1, «Bonaventura Enzo», 1939-44.
- NYPL, MAD, ECADFS, s. III, APA 1938-41, b. 163, f. 4.

Bibliography

- Francesca Cavarocchi, Alessandra Minerbi, *Politica razziale e persecuzione antiebraica nell'ateneo fiorentino*, in Enzo Collotti (ed.), *Razza e fascismo. La persecuzione contro gli ebrei in Toscana 1938-1943*, Rome, Carocci, 1999, pp. 467-510.
- Liana Elda Funaro, *Coi nostri giovani coi nostri vecchi (Esodo 9, X,9). Enzo Bonaventura negli archivi della comunità israelitica di Firenze*, in Simonetta Gori Savellini (ed.), *Enzo Bonaventura (1891-1948). Una singolare vicenda culturale dalla psicologia sperimentale alla psicoanalisi e alla psicologia applicata: atti del convegno di Firenze*, Florence, Giunti, 1989, pp. 131-137.
- Simonetta Gori Savellini, *Enzo Bonaventura dalla psicologia sperimentale alla psicologia pedagogica*, «Bollettino di psicologia

applicata», 182-183, 1987, pp. 37-50.

- Simonetta Gori Savellini (ed.), *Una singolare vicenda culturale dalla psicologia sperimentale alla psicoanalisi e alla psicologia applicata. Atti del convegno di Firenze*, Florence, Giunti, 1989.
- Patrizia Guarnieri, *Senza cattedra. L'Istituto di Psicologia dell'Università di Firenze tra idealismo e fascismo*, Florence, Firenze University Press, 2012.
- Patrizia Guarnieri, *The Zionist Network and Enzo Bonaventura: from Florence to Jerusalem*, in Ead., *Italian Psychology and Jewish Emigration under Fascism*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, pp. 113-153 e pp. 213-221.
- Haim Ormian, *Bonaventura, Enzo Joseph*, in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, ed. by Michael Berenbaum, Fred Skolnik, 2nd ed., vol. 4, Detroit, Thomson Gale, 2007, p. 56.
- Eva Telkes-Klein, *L'université hébraïque de Jérusalem à travers ses acteurs. La première génération de professeurs (1925-1948)*, Paris, Honoré Champion, 2004, pp. 151-154.
- Gabriele Turi, *L'università di Firenze e la persecuzione razziale*, «Italia contemporanea», 219, 2000, pp. 227-247.

Patrizia Guarnieri

Translated by Scott Staton

Publication date: 18 December 2019.

Cite as:

Patrizia Guarnieri, *Enzo (Joseph) Bonaventura*, in Ead., *Intellectuals Displaced from Fascist Italy*, Firenze University Press, 2019. <<http://intellettualinfuga.fupress.com/en>> ISBN: 978-88-6453-872-3

©2019 Firenze University Press

Open Access article published under license CC-BY-SA 4.0