

Amedeo Herlitzka

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A full professor of Human Physiology at the Università di Torino, Herlitzka spent several months in Argentina in 1927, appointed by the Fascist government to propagandize Italian scientific activity and to hold conferences on “the manifestation of the Italian spirit”¹. Ten years later, at the age of 66 he returned to Buenos Aires to escape racial persecution, because the Italian regime had determined that he did not belong to “the Italian race”².

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Education

Amadeo Herlitzka was born in Trieste on 26 December 1872 to Davide Adolfo and Maria Lustig. After completing his secondary studies at the Dante Alighieri high school in Trieste, in 1891 he enrolled in the Facoltà di Medicina e Chirurgia at the Università di Pisa, where he attended for three years, with one interruption, from September 1892 until April 1893. On his return to Trieste he was arrested by the Austrian authorities for having participated in a youth gathering in support of the Italian nature of the City.

From 1894 he continued his studies in Florence, attending the Istituto di Fisiologia Giulio Fano and the Ugo Schiff Laboratorio di Chimica. During these years he met and formed a friendship with Filippo Bottazzi, Gino Galeotti and Giuseppe Levi. After two years, he moved to Rome to study at the Istituto di Fisiologia under the direction of Luigi Luciani. In 1897 he graduated presenting a thesis on «Ricerche sulla differenziazione cellulare nello sviluppo embrionale» (Research on cellular differentiation in embryonal development), which was subsequently published. On returning to Florence he continued his research on histology and chemical biology in the

¹ ASUTo, f. «Amadeo Herlitzka», letter from Herlitzka to the rector of 1 February 1928. See also the letters from 19 January, 16 February and 9 March 1927. Herlitzka was entrusted with this task by the undersecretary of the Italian air force Italo Balbo.

² Point 9 of the «Manifesto degli scienziati razzisti» or «Manifesto della razza», 15 July 1938.

psychiatric clinic directed by Eugenio Tanzi,³ and in 1898 he moved to Turin to work in the Institute headed by the well-known physiologist Angelo Mosso.

Forty years of teaching and research in Turin

Mosso had made him director of the microscopic section and subsequently of the section of physiological chemistry. In 1902 Amedeo had won a competition for a position as assistant and in 1904 qualified as a university teacher in physiology. In 1910 he succeeded his professor at the direction of the Istituto di fisiologia; three years later he became a full professor of human physiology. His three children were born in Turin from his marriage to Frances Straus: Leonardo in 1904, Gino in 1909 and Lucio Paolo in 1916.

An experienced medical volunteer, he sought to find an effective defence against the poisonous effects of toxic gas used in the First World War and invented a gas mask for this purpose, which was not, however, adopted by the army⁴. Thanks to his efforts, in the summer of 1917 the university Istituto di fisiologia became section for Turin of the Ufficio psico-fisiologico dell'Aviazione (dependent on the Ministry of War: ministero della Guerra, Direzione generale dell'Aeronautica, Comando scuole aviatori), which tested the professional aptitude of aspiring pilots⁵.

In 1919 he was entrusted with the direction of the advisory board for the study of gas warfare, and subsequently the ministry of aeronautics nominated him member of the central committee of health studies in aviation. In 1923 Herlitzka became director of the research centre of applied physiology for deep-sea divers situated in San Bartolomeo, near Trieste.

³ The type of research conducted by Herlitzka in the Florentine psychiatric clinic attached to in San Salvi is detailed in *Model curriculum vitae*, n.d. but 1938, in BLO, MS, SPSL, b. 416/9, f. «Herlitzka Amedeo», 1938-47.

⁴ See photo in Istituto di fisiologia umana dell'Università di Torino, *L'università di Torino nella grande guerra*, «Maschera antigas ideata da Amadeo Herlitzka» <<https://www.grandeguerra.unito.it>> (accessed 16 February 2019).

⁵ Marco R. Galloni, *Una Università nella grande guerra. Ricerche ed esperienze dell'ateneo di Torino nel '15-'18*, 2017, pp. 129-130, also in <<http://www.difesa.it>> (accessed 14 February 2019).

He then applied his research to the sense organs (with original results on taste and smell examined in relationship to the chemical nature of stimuli), to respiratory functions, and to high altitude physiology, directing the Institute founded by Angelo Mosso at Col d'Olen, on Monte Rosa.

In February 1927 he was invited by the Biology Institute of Buenos Aires, in the name of the director general of the health of the Argentinian army, Giulio Garino, to hold a series of conferences on physiology related to aeronautics. He was then in South America from April to July 1927, first in Buenos Aires, where he was appointed honorary member of the Medical Association, then in the Universities of Rosario, Montevideo e Santiago del Cile.

Before leaving, he was given «the task of delivering Italian scientific-aeronautic propaganda to South America»⁶ by the undersecretary for Italian aeronautics Italo Balbo.

Looking for work for himself and his son in England

After forty years of working career and research, at the age of 66, Amedeo Herlitzka was expelled from the Italian aeronautic societies, expelled from the Università di Torino and dismissed from all functions he had been entrusted with by the aeronautics ministry as a consequence of the racial laws. Also expelled from the university were his friend and colleague Giuseppe Levi, full professor of human anatomy, his brother Livio Herlitzka,⁷ professor of gynaecology and obstetrics, and his first son Leonardo,⁸ 38 years old, assistant professor in pathological anatomy, voluntary assistant of

⁶ ASUTo f. «Amedeo Herlitzka» letter from Herlitzka to the rector of the Università di Torino, 1 February 1928; Eleonora Maria Smolensky, Vera Vigevani Jarach, *Tante voci una storia. Italiani ebrei in Argentina 1938-1948*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1998, p. 225.

⁷ Also Livio Herlitzka (Trieste 18 January 1870 - Turin 21 July 1948) graduated with a degree in Medicine in Florence, 7 July 1894.

⁸ Leonardo Herlitzka (Turin 30 November 1904 - Turin 20 April 1977) graduated in Medicine at the University of Turin on 9 July 1929 and attained qualification as university teacher in clinical medicine on 20 May 1937. He lost his qualification with the DM 18 March 1939; he emigrated with his family to Buenos Aires, where he resumed academic and scientific activity at the local university. With the DM 5 February 1947, on proposal by the Consiglio della Facoltà di Medicina of the university in Turin, his qualification was reinstated.

general clinical medicine and qualified university teacher of clinical medicine. On the 10th of December 1938 Herlitzka filled out the bilingual questionnaire (English-German) of the Society for the Protection of Science and Learning in London, which he had received from David C. Thompson, General Secretary of the SPSL. Actually, Herlitzka had contacted the SPSL on behalf of his son Leonardo: Was there any possibility of employment for him? Would a deposit of one hundred pounds guaranteed by his father every three months be sufficient? He only mentioned his expulsion from the Facoltà di Fisiologia in Turin in the second part of the letter dated 7th December 1938, asking if there was any possibility of employment⁹.

He found himself for a time in Paris lodging with Madame Jacobi, but on sending his questionnaire he gave his Torino address, in via Toselli 1 bis¹⁰. He pointed out that he had learned from the newspapers, on 10 September 1938, that he would be expelled from the University of Turin «for reasons of religion», effective as of the 16th October. His salary up to that point had been 3,080 lire per month, plus some other earnings, and presumably he was due some form of pension. With his earnings he assumed he would be able to support himself, his wife and a son, who was still living at home at 20 (actually 22), for a year or two.

Regarding in particular his more recent qualifications he declared the physiology of labour, in particular concerning aviators, and human physiology at high altitudes. He was the technical consultant for the pharmaceutical company Schiapparelli of Turin. He spoke French, German and Spanish and read and wrote almost correctly in English. He indicated eight colleagues as possible references, but without indicating the requested addresses (apart from two Italian professors) in the following order:

⁹ BLO, MS, SPSL, b. 416/9, f. «Herlitzke Amadeo», 1938-47 See letter from A. Herlitzka to David C Thompson, 7 December 1938.

¹⁰ Ivi, letter from Herlitzka to David C. Thompson, Paris 10 December 1938, in reply to letter of 7 December 1938. The biographical information that follows in the text is taken from papers from the file, the questionnaire in particular, n.d., but are stamped with the date December 1938, and *Model Curriculum vitae*, n.d.

Archibald V. Hill in London, Adriaan Noyons of the Laboratory of Physiology in Utrecht, A. Meyer from the College de France in Paris, Leonor Michaelis of the Rockefeller Institute in New York, Filippo Bottazzi of Naples, Rodolfo Margaria of the Laboratorio di Fisiologia in Pavia and Aldo Castellani in London. The countries in which he would prefer to go to were England and America, though he was willing to go anywhere except for the USSR¹¹.

The secretary of the SPSL contacted professor Hill at the University of London and explained that, considering Herlitzka's age, he doubted there was any possibility of employment¹². No further correspondence followed for six years.

The next note in the file, dating from 30 September 1944, indicates that, according to Piero Foà, Amedeo Herlitzka was in Buenos Aires. Foà was in the Medical school in Chicago and had only indirect news of the professor, through his father Carlo Foà, who was in Brazil, in San Paolo, and corresponded with the Herlitzkas¹³. On 19 December the secretary of the SPSL, Ilse Ursell, wrote to Foà in Brazil asking for news about himself and in particular about Amedeo and Leonardo Herlitzka, enclosing a letter addressed to the Herlitzkas for the purpose of updating the files of those who were being aided by the SPSL, despite there having actually been very little assistance. London, in fact, never received a reply.

Help and opportunities in Argentina

In 1939 the family had decided to expatriate to Argentina, along with a number of Italian professors dismissed in particular from the universities of Turin and Bologna¹⁴. It was decisive for the Herlitzkas that they could count

¹¹ *Ibidem*.

¹² *Ivi*, see copy of letter from David C Thompson to Herlitzka, and another addressed to V. Hill, both dated 12 December 1938.

¹³ *Ivi*, letter from the SPSL to Piero Foà.

¹⁴ See Ada Korn, *Contributi scientifici degli Italiani in Argentina nel ventesimo secolo*, in *EuroAmericani. La popolazione di origine Italiana in Argentina*, Vol. 2, Turin, Fondazione Agnelli, 1987, pp. 171- 196.

on Amedeo's older brother, who had emigrated to Buenos Aires in 1898. Mauro Herlitzka, electrical engineer, interventionist, financial contributor to a Fascist newspaper, had made his fortune managing several companies in the electrical sector, which precisely in the thirties he had transferred to a company linked to General Electric and to the Morgan Bank¹⁵. Even Giuseppe Levi for a while had counted on the possibility of sending his son Gino to stay with Mauro in Argentina, although the political ideas of the Lopez's, as they called the Herlitzka family, were quite distant from those of their parents and children. Natalia Ginsburg remembered her contemporary: «Lucio was a Fascist, and my brothers made him angry, speaking badly of Mussolini; - Let's not talk about politics -, said Lucio, as soon as he saw my brothers arrive».¹⁶ Amedeo Herlitzka and his wife set up house in Buenos Aires, in Rivadavia, in 1823. He was nominated technical assistant of the department of aviation research in El Palomar, where he installed a pneumatic bell for testing pilots¹⁷. At that time in Buenos Aires there existed Il colegio militare de la Nación and in nearby El Palomar the air brigade and the Escuela Tècnica de aeronáutica. The Italian academic, with his qualifications, was able to find employment in this context. It appears that he did not teach at the University but did continue his research on respiration and the physiology of human labour. He took part in conferences, published various papers and printed one of his main works *Fisiologia del trabajo humano*, published in the Italian edition in 1948. He published a volume in Brazil, entitled *Fisiologia da respiração*, in 1944. In Turin the Facoltà di Medicina e chirurgia acted swiftly to replace him: up until the end of the academic year 1939-40 they entrusted

15 On Mauro Herlitzka (Trieste 8 August 1871- Buenos Aires 11 September 1960), see news in Pantaleone Sergi, *Patria di carta. Storia di un quotidiano coloniale e del giornalismo in Argentina*, Cosenza, Luigi Pellegrini ed, 2012, ad indicem.

16 Natalia Ginzburg, *Lessico familiare*, Turin, Einaudi, 2014, p. 41. There are several similar references to the Lopez's.

17 See E.M Smolensky, V. Vigevani Jarach, *Tante voci una storia*, cit. p 242; Dionisio Petriella, Sara Sosa Miatello, *Diccionario Biogràfico Italolo-Argentino*, Buenos Aires, Asociación Dante Alighieri, 1976, *ad vocem*; Annalisa Capristo, *Il decreto legge del 5 Settembre 1938 e le altre norme antiebraiche nelle scuole, nelle università e nelle accademie*, «La rassegna mensile di Israel», 73, 2, 2007, p. 139.

the teaching of human physiology to Francesco Paolo Mazza, temporary lecturer in biological chemistry, who on May 1940, at the age of 35 passed from junior lecturer to professor of human physiology. Due to the premature death of Mazza in January 1943, Anna Maria Di Giorgio, Professor of Physiology at the University of Siena, took the teaching post.

At 74 he regains his former teaching position

I wish [...] to send best wishes to my colleagues and students working in the field I have studied for 40 years and where I wish to conclude my teaching career. It is my intention to reach the institute as soon as public transport makes it possible.¹⁸

This is what Herlitzka wrote to the rector Mario Allara from Buenos Aires, aware that Vincenzo Arangio Ruiz the minister of Pubblica Istruzione had reinstated him.¹⁹

He returned to Turin in September and resumed teaching and the direction of the Istituto di fisiologia until the 1st of November 1948, the date of his retirement.

To the rector, who had wanted to greet him, he wrote:

It is me that wishes to thank you for the help and kindness that you have demonstrated during the period that I took up teaching again at our University. In the short time that remains for me the memory of the support you offered me will compensate for the unpleasant situation affecting others²⁰.

In effect the jurist Mario Allara in the role of prorector, assisting the rector Luigi Einaudi, who was called to the Bank of Italy, had worked hard to reinstate the professors who had been expelled from the university of Turin. In May 1945, based on the orders of the RDL n°25 of 20 January 1944, he wrote to all of them of the «cancellation of the so-called racial laws». The

¹⁸ ASUTo, f. «Amadeo Herlitzka», letter from Herlitzka to the rector M. Allara, Buenos Aires, 25 March 1946.

¹⁹ Ivi, letter from minister V. Arangio-Ruiz to the rector M. Allara, December 1945.

²⁰ Ivi, letter from A. Herlitzka to the rector M. Allara, 8 December 1948, in reply to letter from M. Allara, 4 December 1948.

faculty awaited their imminent return «after their unjust dismissal»²¹. None of the eight professors involved in Turin applied. Art. 4 of RDL n.9 of 6 January 1944, art.1 and art. first par. of the RDL n. 9 of 6th January 1944 provided for automatic reinstatement, and this was respected, although not always and not everywhere. However, they were expected to answer the request from the ministry to provide information regarding residence, family status, Italian citizenship, and acceptance of reinstatement.²²

The first official communications from the ministry regarding *ad nomen* readmission to service arrived in June 1945 for Arnaldo Momigliano (1908-1987), who chose not to return, in November for Gino Fano (1871-1952), and in December for Herlitzka, at which time Allara had been rector for a month. Later the ministerial decrees arrived from Arangio-Ruiz and subsequently Enrico Molé. The treatment reserved for Giuseppe Levi, whose reinstatement goes back to November 1944, was quite particular.

It was another matter entirely for the other professors removed in 1938, who despite the favourable situation in Turin had no guarantee of being reinstated. Leonardo Herlitzka, therefore, born 1904, stayed in Argentina while his father returned to his teaching post in human physiology at the age of 74 at the end of 1946, obviously for a short time. It was agreed that Di Giorgio would remain as a full professor of physiology teaching biological chemistry. Amadeo Herlitzka left the university in November 1948 after half a century of scientific activity and 124 publications in various areas of experimental physiology. He died a few months later in Turin on the 12th of July²³.

21 ASUTo, *Amministrazione, Carteggio 1944- 45*, f.2. 1, «General staff XIV. B 413», undated letter, sent by the vice-commissioner professor Mario Allara to professors Amadeo Herlitzka, Giuseppe Levi, Giuseppe Ottolenghi, Gino Fano, Alessandro Terracini, Zaccaria Debenedetti, Giorgio Falco, Arnaldo Momigliano, Cino Vitta. Allara sent an analogous or similar letter to other professors.

22 Ivi, p. 115. See also ASUTo, f. «Santorre Debenedetti», letter from the rector M. Allara of 4 April 1946 to the ministry of Pubblica Istruzione, in reply to the letter of 20 March 1946.

23 Angelo Viziano, *Un fisiologo di fama mondiale. Amadeo Herlitzka morto in una clinica*, «Stampa sera», 12 July 1949.

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