

David Diringer's Refugee Itinerary: From Foreign Student in Fascist Italy to Academic in Post-War Britain

by Anna Teicher

Abstract

While David Diringer (1900-1975) is known for his contribution to the history of the alphabet, his life is presented here as a case study in intellectual migration in the first half of the twentieth century. Numerus clausus restrictions in the newly independent countries of Eastern Europe and the lack of provision for higher education in Palestine prompted many Jewish students including Diringer to take up the advantageous conditions offered to foreign students by the new Fascist government in Italy. As one of the small cohort successful in obtaining the requisite Italian citizenship to launch a university career, Diringer's trajectory was disrupted by the loss of his position and his expulsion from Italy following the 1938 racial legislation. As a refugee academic in Britain, unsuccessful in attempts to reach the US or return to post-war Italy, he was precariously dependent on grants until he finally obtained a university position in 1948.

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Acknowledgments

The surge in studies since the late 1980s and the interpretative re-evaluation of the position of Jews during the Fascist period¹ have seen an emergence of interest in the presence of foreign Jews in Italy and in intellectual migration from the country in the wake of the 1938 racial legislation. This essay sets out to consider both these themes through the prism of the career of David Diringer (1900-1975) and its trajectory. A Semitic epigrapher who became a pioneering contributor to the history of the alphabet,² he experienced a series of displacements that impacted on European Jews in the first half of the twentieth century. Born in the Austro-Hungarian province of Galicia which later became part of the inter-war Polish Republic, he left the anti-Semitic environment of the newly independent country

¹ Michele Sarfatti, *Gli ebrei nell'Italia fascista. Vicende, identità, persecuzione* (Turin: Einaudi, 2018); Sarfatti, *Mussolini contro gli ebrei. Cronaca dell'elaborazione delle leggi del 1938* (Turin: Zamorani, 2017). For an overview of the debate, see Guri Schwarz, "Interpreting Fascist anti-Semitism: Jewish memories and the scholarly debate in Italy, from Liberation to the present," in *Beyond Camps and forced labour. Current international research on survivors of Nazi persecution. Proceedings of the first international multidisciplinary conference at the Imperial War Museum, London, 29-31 January 2003*, eds. Johannes-Dieter Steinert and Inge Weber-Newth (Osnabrück: Secolo, 2005), 398-411 (CD-ROM papers); Annalisa Capristo and Ernest Ialongo, "On the 80th anniversary of the Racial Laws. Articles reflecting the Current Scholarship on Italian Fascist Anti-Semitism in honour of Michele Sarfatti," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 24, no. 1 (2019): 1-13.

² Diringer's principal works include: *L'alfabeto nella storia della civiltà* (Florence: Barbèra, 1937) (2nd ed. Florence: Giunti-Barbèra, 1969); *The Alphabet: A Key to the History of Mankind* (London: Hutchinson's scientific and technical publications, 1948 and subsequent editions); *The hand-produced book* (London: Hutchinson's scientific and technical publications, 1953) re-published as *The Book before Printing: Ancient, Medieval and Oriental* (New York: Dover publications, 1982); *The Illuminated Book: Its History and Production* (London: Faber and Faber, 1958); *Writing* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1962) (reprint 1965).

and after a stay in Palestine moved to Italy for his university studies. He succeeded in launching his academic career there before it was abruptly ended by the Italian racial legislation in 1938, forcing him into exile in Britain and a protracted search for an academic position.

The story of the emigration of German Jews into Italy following the Nazi seizure of power in 1933 has been revealed by Klaus Voigt.³ But there was also an earlier experience, one involving mainly young Eastern European Jews—Diringer among them—who flocked to Italy in the 1920s and 1930s to take up the advantageous conditions for study at Italian universities offered to foreign students in the first months of the Fascist regime. Diringer was one of the first to arrive in what became a stream of migrant students seeking an escape from the discrimination of *numerus clausus* restrictions in their home countries, a movement which continued, despite the introduction of disincentives, until 1938.⁴ Italian cultural propaganda had seen this invitation as a way of disseminating Italian culture abroad, based on the premise that the beneficiaries would return to their countries of origin. There were however those, particularly among the Jewish contingent, who sought instead to remain and to forge their careers in Italy following their degrees. It is this largely unstudied cohort and the small number of those among them who were intent on trying to enter the Italian university system for whom the experience of David Diringer serves as a case study.⁵

³ Klaus Voigt, *Il rifugio precario. Gli esuli in Italia dal 1933 al 1945*, 2 vols. (Scandicci: La Nuova Italia, 1993 and 1996).

⁴ Elisa Signori, “Una peregrinatio academica in età contemporanea. Gli studenti ebrei stranieri nelle università italiane tra le due guerre,” *Annali di storia delle università italiane* 4 (2000): 139-162; Signori, “Contro gli studenti. La persecuzione antiebraica negli atenei italiani e le comunità studentesche,” in “*Per la difesa della razza. L’applicazione delle leggi antiebraiche nelle università italiane*,” eds. Valeria Galimi and Giovanna Procacci (Milan: Edizioni Unicopli, 2009), 173-210; Signori, “Migrazioni forzate e strategie formative oltre i confini. Gli studenti stranieri, ebrei e non, nelle Università italiane (1900-1940),” in *Disegnare, attraversare, cancellare i confini. Una prospettiva interdisciplinare*, ed. Anna Rita Calabrò (Turin: Giappichelli, 2018), 184-197. On the measures introduced in March 1923 exonerating foreign students from the payment of university fees, see Anna Teicher, “Studenti stranieri, studenti ebrei: nuove presenze nell’ateneo fiorentino nei primi anni del fascismo,” in *L’invenzione della razza. L’impatto delle leggi razziali in Toscana. Atti del Convegno di Studi, 24-25 gennaio 2019, Atti e Memorie dell’Accademia Toscana di Scienze e Lettere*, “La Colombaria,” 84 (N.S. 70) Anno 2019 (Florence: Olschki, 2020), 207-220.

⁵ Anna Teicher, “Da discriminati a rifugiati: gli studiosi ebrei stranieri dell’ateneo fiorentino,” in *L’emigrazione intellettuale dall’Italia fascista. Studenti e studiosi ebrei dell’Università di Firenze in fuga all’estero*, ed. Patrizia Guarnieri (Florence: Firenze University Press, 2019), 41-55.

Having decided to pursue an academic career in Italy, Diringer and his colleagues faced challenges in common with their Italian peers as they sought to position themselves with regard to the Fascist regime. But they also faced particular challenges. The prerequisite of Italian citizenship for obtaining an academic position, sanctioned by Gentile's 1923 reform of the universities,⁶ would come to prove an insurmountable obstacle after citizenship became increasingly difficult for foreign Jews to obtain as the 1930s progressed. In practice, it was only those individuals, like Diringer, who applied early who were able to acquire this essential passport to academic advancement. For others in the cohort who applied later—and for the German Jews arriving from 1933—the road into academia was, with very few exceptions, to all intents and purposes barred.⁷

When the racial legislation was promulgated in September 1938, academics of foreign origin, like Diringer, found themselves in a situation of extreme difficulty. Like their Italian Jewish colleagues, they lost their positions. But at the same time, as foreign Jews who had obtained Italian citizenship since 1919, their citizenship was revoked and, unlike their Italian counterparts, they were given notice of expulsion from Italy with six months to leave the country.⁸ They were propelled into an urgent search for alternative placements, all the more urgent in the case of those like Diringer who had by that time married and had a family.⁹

The predominantly Jewish experience of intellectual migration from Italy as a result of the 1938 legislation has only relatively recently become the subject of scholarly attention and there is much that still remains uncharted regarding the numbers involved and the narrative of relocation to the US, Latin America, Mandate Palestine, Britain and elsewhere. This stands in contrast to the wealth of studies on exiled German or German-speaking, in the main Jewish, scholars, including those from central and Eastern Europe, who fled European

⁶ Regio Decreto (RD), 30 September 1923, no. 2102, art. 115 and art. 35, comma 3: lectors in foreign languages were exempt from the citizenship requirement.

⁷ Teicher, "Da discriminati a rifugiati," 44-45. Voigt, *Il rifugio precario*, vol. 1, 41-42, cites the few German refugees who succeeded in obtaining citizenship.

⁸ Sarfatti, *Mussolini contro gli ebrei*, 47-51: "I provvedimenti legislativi razzisti e antiebraici dell'1-2 settembre." For a recent overview (with bibliography) of the consequences of the racial legislation in the field of education, see Michele Sarfatti, "La persecuzione antiebraica fascista nelle scuole e nell'università," *Rivista di storia dell'educazione* 2 (2019): 11-30.

⁹ Teicher, "Da discriminati a rifugiati," 47-51.

totalitarianism during the 1930s, and reflects an initial focus in Italian historiography on the political emigration of anti-Fascist dissenters, including the Jewish intellectuals among them. This study of Diringer's experience is thus offered here as a contribution to the growing body of work on intellectual migrants from Italy, whether Jewish or not,¹⁰ through the particular perspective of circumstances in Britain. While existing literature has focused on the US and Latin America, as well as Palestine,¹¹ the albeit numerically much more circumscribed group that after 1938 found its way to Britain is currently less well served.¹² By then,

¹⁰ See the series of volumes "Italiani dall'esilio" currently being published by Donzelli under the directorship of Renato Camurri; the recent project launched by Patrizia Guarnieri, *Intellectuals Displaced from Fascist Italy: Migrants, Exiles and Refugees Fleeing for Political and Racial Reasons* (Florence: Firenze University Press, 2023), <https://intellettualinfuga.com>. Accessed July 9, 2024; Guarnieri, ed., *L'emigrazione intellettuale dall'Italia fascista*; Guarnieri, "L'emigrazione intellettuale ebraica dalla Toscana," in *L'invenzione della razza*, 265-280. For an earlier overview, see "The State of Research: Conversation with Annalisa Capristo," Primo Levi Center, New York, 2010, <https://primolevicenter.org/the-state-of-research-conversation-with-annalisa-capristo/>. Accessed July 9, 2024.

¹¹ For example, Eleonora Maria Smolensky and Vera Vigevari Jarach, *Tante voci, una storia. Italiani ebrei in Argentina, 1938-1948* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1998); Arturo Marzano, *Una terra per rinascere. Gli ebrei italiani e l'emigrazione in Palestina prima della guerra (1920-1940)* (Genova: Marietti, 2003); Renato Camurri, "Idee in movimento: l'esilio degli intellettuali italiani negli Stati Uniti (1930-1945)," *Memoria e Ricerche* 31 (2009): 43-62; Camurri, ed., "Mussolini's Gifts: Exiles from Fascist Italy," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 15, no. 5 (2010); Annalisa Capristo, "'Fare fagotto'. L'emigrazione intellettuale dall'Italia fascista dopo il 1938," *La Rassegna mensile di Israel*, 76, no. 3 (2010): 177-200; Alessandra Gissi, "Italian Scientific Migration to the United States of America after 1938 Racial Laws," *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaften* 3 (2010): 100-118; Gianna Pontecorboli, *America. Nuova terra promessa. Storia di ebrei in fuga dal fascismo* (Milan: Brioschi, 2013).

¹² Cecil Roth, "Reminiscenze sugli ebrei italiani durante le loro traversie," *La Rassegna mensile di Israel* 31, no. 5 (1965): 204-208; Lucio Sponza, "Jewish Refugees from Fascist Italy to Britain," in *The Jews of Italy: Memory and Identity*, eds. Bernard D. Cooperman and Barbara Garvin (Bethesda, MD: University Press of Maryland, 2000), 425-442; Kate Lowe, "'I shall snuffle about and make relations': Nicolai Rubinstein, the Historian of Renaissance Florence in Oxford during the War," in *Ark of Civilization: Refugee Scholars and Oxford University, 1930-1945*, eds. Sally Crawford, Katharina Ulmschneider, and Jaś Elsner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 220-233; Oswyn Murray, "Arnaldo Momigliano on Peace and Liberty (1940)," in *Ark of Civilization*, eds. Crawford, Ulmschneider, and Elsner, 201-207; Anna Teicher, "Jacob Leib Teicher between Florence and Cambridge: Arabic and Jewish philosophy in Wartime Oxford," in *Ark of Civilization*, eds. Crawford, Ulmschneider, and Elsner, 327-340; Francesca Fiorani, *Paolo Treves. Tra esilio e impegno repubblicano (1908-1958)* (Rome: Donzelli, 2020); the relevant biographical entries (for refugees with a connection to Tuscany) in Guarnieri, *Intellectuals displaced from Fascist Italy*.

wherever they went, refugees from Italy suffered from being the last in line in an international academic exodus, but Diringer's case serves to illustrate the particular difficulties encountered in the more restricted academic labor market in Britain compared to the US, a situation further aggravated as the war progressed and the practical possibilities of moving away from Britain receded.

At the end of the war, Diringer's search for settled employment continued in the wider geography that peace permitted. His quest included a return to Italy, where his experience further links into discussion of the challenges faced by Italian academics, particularly those of the younger generation, in trying to resume their interrupted careers there.¹³ And for him, like others in his cohort of foreign Jews, this also involved re-establishing his revoked Italian citizenship. As this essay discusses, he encountered what amounted to an impossible task as he explored his chances of return. His story is thus one of a great many stories of exile, of the very real challenges he confronted in establishing himself for a second time in a new country, and highlights the crucial role played by patronage in achieving a successful outcome. Diringer's own struggle was particularly drawn-out, a vitiating factor being the nature of his academic specialization. While Semitic epigraphy was part of a tradition of scholarship in Italy, in the English-speaking world he found it very difficult to gain acceptance for his research within an academic context. His original preference had been to try to establish himself in the US, but ultimately it would be Britain, the country where he had found sanctuary back in 1939 that after nearly ten long years finally came to his rescue when, in 1948, he was appointed to what was in effect a specially created position for him at the University of Cambridge.

¹³ Dianella Gagliani, ed., *Il difficile rientro. Il ritorno dei docenti ebrei nell'università del dopoguerra* (Bologna: CLUEB, 2004); Francesca Pelini, "Appunti per una storia della reintegrazione dei professori universitari perseguitati per motivi razziali," in *Gli ebrei in Italia tra persecuzione fascista e reintegrazione postbellica*, eds. Ilaria Pavan and Guri Schwarz (Florence: Giuntina, 2001), 113-139; Francesca Pelini and Ilaria Pavan, *La doppia epurazione. L'università di Pisa e le leggi razziali tra guerra e dopoguerra* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2009). For a recent treatment see, Giovanni Montroni, *La continuità necessaria. Università e professori dal fascismo alla Repubblica* (Florence: Le Monnier, 2016).

Background and Arrival in Italy

Diringer was born on 16 June 1900 in Tlumach in the then Austrian-Hungarian province of Galicia.¹⁴ He was the fourth of six children born to Jacob Munzer (Mintzer) and Mirl Diringer, and throughout his life he used his mother's surname.¹⁵ During the First World War, having joined a movement consisting for the most part of Jews seeking refuge in the Imperial capital, he relocated to Vienna where he completed his secondary education.¹⁶ It was also in Vienna that he became a member of the Socialist-Zionist youth organization Hashomer Hatzair, and was active in the movement on his return to his native Tlumach after service in the Austrian army. Driven by his Zionist convictions, in 1920 Diringer left Europe for Mandate Palestine as part of the third *aliyah*, and became a member of kibbutz Beit-Alpha, founded in 1922 by pioneers from Poland.¹⁷ His stay in Palestine was however short-lived, in part because he contracted malaria and in part because until the foundation of the Hebrew University in 1925 there was no provision for higher education which forced aspiring students to move away for their university degrees.¹⁸

¹⁴ Galicia was part of the Second Polish Republic between the First and Second World Wars, and its Eastern section, including Tlumach is now in Ukraine.

¹⁵ "Diringer, Davide," Sezione Studenti, f. 138, ins. 2707, Archivio Storico dell'Università degli Studi di Firenze (ASUFI), Florence. The profession of Diringer's father is given as *segretario comunale*, but it is unclear whether the position was a municipal one or whether his father was employed by the Jewish community. Diringer together with two sisters who eventually moved to the US were the only members of his immediate family to survive the Holocaust. For a presentation of Diringer's life and career, see also Ida Zatelli, "In ricordo di David Diringer," in *L'invenzione della razza*, 113-120.

¹⁶ At the Realgymnasium in Vereinsgasse which offered classes in Polish to Galician refugee students. David Diringer, autobiographical notes made available courtesy of Mrs Ray Wolf, Private Archive Anna Teicher, Cambridge, UK.

¹⁷ Munio Wurman, "Prof. David Diringer and Hashomer Hatzair," in *Memorial Book of Tlumacz (Tlumach, Ukraine)*, (translation of *Tlumacz-Tlomitsch. Sefer 'edut ve-zikaron*), eds. Shlomo Blond et al. (Tel-Aviv: Tlumacz Society, 1976), LXXI and LXXIX; Guido Mazzoni, "Preliminari," in David Diringer, *L'alfabeto nella storia della civiltà*, 2nd ed., VIII, also for additional details on Diringer's experiences in the First World War.

¹⁸ David Diringer, "Jewish students in Fascist Italy and in war-time Cambridge," in *Studies in the Cultural Life of the Jews of England*, eds. Dov Noy, Issachar Ben-Ami, and Avraham Harman (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1975), 43.

For Diringer, the Italian government's introduction in the spring of 1923 of favorable conditions to encourage the presence of foreign students, absolving them initially at least from the payment of university fees, could not therefore have come at a more propitious moment, and he enrolled at the first opportunity in the Facoltà di Lettere of the University of Florence (then still the Istituto di Studi Superiori, Pratici e di Perfezionamento) for the academic year 1923-1924.¹⁹



Fig. 1. Portrait of David Diringer.²⁰

University Studies and the Decision to Remain in Italy

Diringer enjoyed a highly successful undergraduate career and was awarded the highest classification for his degree thesis, presented in November 1927, on *Le iscrizioni palestinesi in antico ebraico*, under the direction of Umberto Cassuto, professor of Hebrew language and literature. He went on to complete a further qualification, the *diploma di perfezionamento in storia antica*, two years later in 1929, this time specializing in Etruscology, and was again awarded the highest

¹⁹ "Diringer, Davide," Sezione Studenti, f. 138, ins. 2707, ASUFi, Florence.

²⁰ David Diringer, *Writing* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1962), dust cover.

classification for his thesis entitled *Ricerche casentinesi*.²¹ During his student years, drawing on his experience of youth activism in Hashomer Hatzair, Diringer emerged as a central figure in the organization of Jewish student life in Italy, in particular with regard to foreign Jewish students at Italian universities, attempting—ultimately without success—to link the student organization in Italy to the fledgling international Jewish student movement, and combining this with a deep sense of gratitude owed to Italy as the country which had offered the chance of higher education.²² The declaration of “undying devotion to Italy” with which the young Diringer rallied his fellow students back in 1925²³ clearly became an abiding sentiment and must have informed the decision he took to remain in Italy and forge his academic career there. Once again, he was fortunate in his timing, as his prompt application to become an Italian citizen, made in the course of the first year of his *perfezionamento*, placed him among the successful early claimants of his student cohort, enabling him, unlike colleagues who applied later on, to comply with the requirement of citizenship for holders of university positions. Diringer’s Italian citizenship came through two years later in the summer of 1930.²⁴ His links to Italy were further cemented by his marriage at the end of 1927, a few weeks after his graduation, to Elena Cecchini, and the birth of their daughter Kedma in May 1932.

Diringer Begins his Academic Career

The years following his *diploma di perfezionamento* saw Diringer’s return to the material of his degree thesis on ancient Hebrew inscriptions, in preparation for its

²¹ Zatelli, “In ricordo di David Diringer,” 116; “Diringer, Davide,” Sezione Studenti, f. 138, ins. 2707, ASUFI, Florence.

²² See Teicher, “Studenti stranieri, studenti ebrei,” 218-219.

²³ “[...] imperitura devozione verso l’Italia” in “Dalle città d’Italia-Da Firenze: Il Prof. Pistelli alla mensa accademica,” *Israel*, February 5, 1925, 6, cited in Teicher, “Studenti stranieri, studenti ebrei,” 216.

²⁴ Ufficio Personale, Ministero dell’Interno to Pubblica Sicurezza, 25 June 1928, “Diringer, Davide,” Ministero dell’Interno (MI), Direzione Generale Pubblica Sicurezza (DGPS), Divisione affari generali e riservati (DAGR), A4, b. 110, Archivio Centrale dello Stato (ACS), Rome; Ufficio Personale, Ministero dell’Interno, 30 June 1930, on concession of citizenship registered at the Corte dei Conti, 27 June 1930.

publication under the auspices of the Facoltà di Lettere of Florence University. For this, he received funding not only from Florence University but also from the Ministero degli Affari Esteri and the Società Geografica Italiana, and was able to undertake research in Palestine.²⁵ His volume *Le iscrizioni antico-ebraiche palestinesi* was the second in a planned new series of faculty publications, the first of which was his professor Cassuto's book *La questione della Genesi*. Both came out in 1934.²⁶ The appearance of his first book provided the conditions for Diringers's successful application to become a *libero docente*, after he had been forced to withdraw his initial attempt the previous year owing to publication delays.²⁷ The area of expertise for which the *libera docenza* was granted in November 1934 was defined as *antichità ed epigrafia ebraiche*²⁸ and, the following spring, the Facoltà di Lettere in Florence agreed to Diringers's exercising his *libera docenza* at the faculty, as well as the program of the course he proposed for the new academic year.²⁹ Diringers was now launched on an academic career in a field of specialization that placed him in a distinguished Italian tradition of scholarship in Semitic epigraphy, within which the importance of his 1934 book as the first systematic treatment of ancient Hebrew inscriptions has recently been underlined.³⁰

The preceding years had seen Diringers forge diverse links within the Italian academic establishment. His most significant association was with the Centro di

²⁵ "Verbali Adunanze (1927-1932)," Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia, Consiglio di Facoltà, ASUFi, Florence, 8 July 1929, 145; 28 November 1929, 161; 28 January 1930, 169; 15 January 1931, 257; 10 February 1931, 272.

²⁶ Ibid., 7 November 1932, un-numbered. Both volumes were published by Le Monnier, Florence.

²⁷ David Diringers to Ministero dell'Educazione Nazionale, 18 October 1933, "Diringers, David," Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione (MPI), Direzione Generale Istruzione Superiore (DGIS), Liberi Docenti, 3a serie (1930-1950), b. 186, Archivio Centrale dello Stato (ACS), Rome.

²⁸ Ibid., Decreto Ministeriale, 26 November 1934.

²⁹ "Verbali Adunanze (1932-1941)," Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia, Consiglio di Facoltà, ASUFi, Florence, 25 March 1935, 140.

³⁰ Zatelli, "In ricordo di David Diringers"; Zatelli, "Gli studi ebraici a Firenze durante il regime fascista: l'epilogo di una lunga e gloriosa tradizione," in *La chiesa fiorentina e il soccorso agli ebrei. Luoghi, istituzioni, percorsi (1943-1944)*, eds. Francesca Cavarocchi and Elena Mazzini (Rome: Viella, 2018), 75-87; Felice Israel, "L'epigrafia ebraica antica in Italia," in *Hebraica: miscellanea di studi in onore di Sergio J. Sierra per il suo 75 compleanno*, eds. Felice Israel, Alfredo Mordechai Rabello and Alberto M. Somekh (Turin: Istituto di studi ebraici-Scuola rabbinica S. H. Margulies-D. Disegni, 1998), 275-279 which also discusses the international reception of Diringers's first book.

Studi Coloniali,³¹ a connection which aligned him whether through expediency or conviction—and in contrast to others of his cohort of foreign Jewish academics—with the Fascist project. In 1931 he had taken part in the organization of the first Congress of Colonial Studies, held in Florence at the initiative of the Istituto Cesare Alfieri, and had then been appointed secretary to the Centro di Studi Coloniali, established under the auspices of the Istituto in the wake of the congress, being commended for his zealous services.³² He held this position until 1935, and in that year became a member of the *consiglio direttivo* of the Centro, participating again both in 1934 and 1937 in the organization of the second and third congresses of Colonial Studies.³³ He was also on the board of the Società Asiatica Italiana (1935-1938) and of the Florentine section of the Istituto Fascista dell’Africa Italiana (formerly the Istituto Coloniale Fascista) which collaborated closely with the Centro di Studi Coloniali.³⁴ His links with institutions heavily involved in promoting Fascist colonial propaganda brought Diringer into contact with high-ranking members of the Fascist party, in particular Prince Piero Ginori Conti who served as *commissario straordinario* of the Cesare Alfieri from 1928 to 1935 and was the founder and president of the Centro di Studi Coloniali whose

³¹ On the foundation of the Centro, see Giampaolo Malgeri, “La nascita della ‘Rivista di studi politici internazionali’ (Firenze, 1934),” *Rivista di studi politici internazionali* 84, no. 2, (2017): 240-243.

³² R. Istituto superiore di scienze sociali e politiche “Cesare Alfieri,” Centro di studi coloniali, *Atti del primo congresso di studi coloniali, Firenze, 8-12 aprile 1931*, vol. 1 (Florence: Tipografia Giuntina, 1931), 11, 14 and 54; R. Istituto superiore di scienze sociali e politiche “Cesare Alfieri,” *Annuario per l’anno accademico 1931-1932* (Florence: Tipografia Classica, 1932), 6-8.

³³ Curriculum vitae, undated, “Diringer, David,” Special Collections and Western Manuscripts (MS), Society for the Protection of Science and Learning (SPSL), 251/2, Bodleian Libraries (BL), Oxford, fol. 81; R. Istituto superiore di scienze sociali e politiche “Cesare Alfieri,” Centro di studi coloniali, *Atti del secondo congresso di studi coloniali, Napoli, 1-5 ottobre 1934*, vol. 1 (Florence: Tipografia Giuntina di Leo S. Olschki, 1935), 9 and 10; R. Istituto superiore di scienze sociali e politiche “Cesare Alfieri,” Centro di studi coloniali, *Atti del terzo congresso di studi coloniali, Firenze-Roma, 12-17 aprile 1937*, vol. 1 (Florence: G. C. Sansoni, 1937), 11 and 14.

³⁴ Curriculum vitae, undated, “Diringer, David,” MS, SPSL, 251/2, BL, Oxford, fol. 81; Francesca Cavarocchi and Alessandra Minerbi, “Politica razziale e persecuzione antiebraica nell’ateneo fiorentino,” in *Razza e fascismo. La persecuzione contro gli ebrei in Toscana (1938-1943)*, ed. Enzo Collotti, vol. 1 (Rome: Carocci, 1999), 507; Malgeri, “La nascita della ‘Rivista di studi politici internazionali’,” 241.

secretary Diringer had been.³⁵ Ginori Conti also employed Diringer as secretary in a private capacity, a role that continued to provide employment in the months following the racial laws and the loss of his academic positions.³⁶ The Centro also offered the context for his encounter with Guido Valensin whose importance for Diringer's subsequent fortunes in Britain will be discussed later on. In addition, Italian police files hint at activity undertaken by him on behalf of the Fascist party.³⁷ In tandem with these multifarious activities, Diringer pressed forward with his own research work, continuing his copious output of articles, and following his initial 1934 book with a vast volume, *L'alfabeto nella storia della civiltà*, published in 1937, with its generously worded foreword by the eminent Italianist Guido Mazzoni.³⁸ In November of that year Diringer was granted a personal audience with the King of Italy, and this was followed a few months later—now less than six months prior to the racial legislation—by a further audience, this time with Mussolini.³⁹

³⁵ Sandro Rogari, "Il 'Cesare Alfieri' da Istituto a Facoltà di Scienze Politiche," in *L'università degli Studi di Firenze, 1924-2004* (Florence: Olschki, 2004), 680; Malgeri, "La nascita della 'Rivista di studi politici internazionali'," 241.

³⁶ Prefettura di Livorno to Prefettura di Firenze, 7 October 1937, "Diringer, Davide," MI, DGPS, DAGR, A4, b. 110, ACS, Rome; Prefettura di Firenze to MI, DGPS, 10 November 1937; David Diringer to Joseph Bright Skemp, undated, but received 17 November 1945, "Diringer, David," MS, SPSL, 251/2, BL, Oxford, fol. 361.

³⁷ Prefettura di Livorno to Prefettura di Firenze, 7 October 1937, "Diringer, Davide," MI, DGPS, DAGR, A4, b. 110, ACS, Rome.

³⁸ Diringer, *L'alfabeto nella storia della civiltà*.

³⁹ Curriculum vitae, undated, "Diringer, David," MS, SPSL, 251/2, BL, Oxford, fol. 81.



Fig.2. Meeting of a delegation of the ruling council of the Centro di Studi Coloniali at the R. Istituto Orientale, Naples. The figure seated at the desk on the right is in all probability David Diringer, secretary of the Centro di Studi Coloniali.⁴⁰

And yet, despite these manifestations of acceptance, Diringer's position was precarious. When the racial legislation removed him from Italian academic life, he was said to have been, "[...] in the way of getting a Chair of Hebrew in Rome."⁴¹ But this had not happened, and he remained a *libero docente* with no fixed tenure. Back in 1935, a proposal to the Facoltà di Lettere in Florence by the Arabist Giuseppe Furlani that Diringer be given the *incarico di ebraico* had been rejected.⁴² Two years later, new regulations governing the content of degree courses, together with the absence in Florence of a Chair in Hebrew following Cassuto's departure for Rome in 1932, forced Diringer to try to broaden the field of his *libera docenza* by changing its title from *antichità ed epigrafia ebraiche* to *storia orientale antica*

⁴⁰ *Atti del secondo congresso di studi coloniali, Napoli, 1-5 ottobre 1934*, vol. 1 (Florence: Tipografia Giuntina di Leo S. Olschki, 1935)

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, fol. 101, information sheet, 25 January 1939.

⁴² "Verbali Adunanze (1932-1941)," Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia, Consiglio di Facoltà, ASUFi, Florence, 11 June 1935, 150.

with a view to widening the appeal of his teaching.⁴³ In this he was not successful, although some leeway was clearly allowed in practice, at least with regard to the content of his course, and the title of his *libera docenza* was referred to, unofficially at least, as *antichità ed epigrafia orientali*, the nomenclature he would give it in his application to the London-based Society for the Protection of Science and Learning (SPSL) in the autumn of 1938.⁴⁴

These difficulties were in a sense a harbinger of the very real issues Diringer would encounter after his departure from Italy because of the perceived narrowness of his subject of specialization. Nor were the practicalities of his life in Florence easy. His position as *libero docente* did not provide him with anything like material security and he needed to earn his living to provide for his family. To this end, he taught German, serving from 1931 to 1938 as lector at the Istituto Superiore di Magistero (upgraded to Facoltà di Magistero from 1936).⁴⁵ At the end of 1935, through Guido Mazzoni, he was offered German teaching at the boarding school for girls at Poggio Imperiale on the outskirts of Florence.⁴⁶ Despite his efforts, his financial position remained insecure. “He lives in limited economic circumstances.”⁴⁷ The phrase comes from material in the police file on Diringer dating to the early winter of 1937 in the lead-up to Hitler’s visit to Italy the following spring. From it emerges an accusation that he exploited his Fascist connections to conceal his involvement in the struggle against Nazism, using his

⁴³ “Appunto per il Sig. Direttore Generale,” undated, but summer of 1937, “Diringer, David,” MPI, DGIS, Liberi Docenti, 3a serie (1930-1950), b. 186, ACS, Rome; Mario Salmi (Preside of the Facoltà di Lettere) to David Diringer, 28 June 1937; Application sent by David Diringer to the DGIS, Ministero dell’Educazione Nazionale, 10 July 1937; Giuseppe Giustini (DGIS at the Ministry) to David Diringer, 26 July and 2 August 1937; David Diringer to Giuseppe Giustini, undated, but in response to Giustini’s letter of 26 July.

⁴⁴ Mazzoni, “Preliminari,” in Diringer, *L’alfabeto nella storia della civiltà*, VIII; curriculum vitae, undated “Diringer, David,” MS, SPSL, 251/2, BL, Oxford, fol. 81.

⁴⁵ Certificate issued on 3 February 1939 certifying Diringer’s teaching at the Magistero, Allegato no. 1, attached to letter from David Diringer to the Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione, 15 February 1946, “Diringer, David,” MPI, DGIS, Liberi Docenti, 3a serie (1930-1950), b. 186, ACS, Rome; “Registri delle lezioni”: lettore di lingua e letteratura tedesca, Archivio storico della Facoltà di Magistero.

⁴⁶ “Al prof. Diringer sull’insegnamento del tedesco (dicembre 6),” Allegati-II, Carteggio e atti, no. 58, Affari diversi, 1935-1940, December 1935, Archivio Storico, Educando Statale SS. Annunziata, Florence.

⁴⁷ Prefettura di Firenze to MI, DGPS, 10 November 1937, “Diringer, Davide,” MI, DGPS, DAGR, A4, b. 110, ACS, Rome: “Versa in modeste condizioni economiche.”

relationship with Ginori Conti to send abroad material “of an undercover nature” to the detriment of Fascist Italy. He was put under “circumspect and unobtrusive surveillance,” with the threat that his Italian citizenship would be revoked, although by the following July no incriminating evidence had emerged.⁴⁸ It was now however only a matter of weeks before the whole complex edifice of his Italian existence collapsed in September 1938.

A Haven Sought and Found: Florence, Autumn 1938-London, Spring 1939

The double blow of loss of their academic positions and expulsion from Italy within six months, delivered to Jews of foreign origin like Diringer in the first draft of the racial legislation in early September 1938, necessitated an immediate quest for employment outside the country they had come to consider their home.⁴⁹ In common with their Italian colleagues who also sought to leave, they turned to the available mechanisms for facilitating departure—to senior academics in Italy willing to exploit their own international contacts (with varying degrees of success) on behalf of their protégés,⁵⁰ to their own academic contacts abroad, and to the aid organizations that had been in operation since 1933, initially to relieve the plight of German academic refugees, principally the Society for the Protection of Science and Learning (SPSL) in Britain and the Emergency Committee in Aid of Displaced Foreign Scholars (EC) in the US.⁵¹ The difficulties refugees from Italy encountered

⁴⁸ Ibid., Prefettura di Livorno to Prefettura di Firenze (copy to MI, DGPS), 7 October 1937: “[...] di carattere spionistico”; MI to Ministero della Guerra, Ufficio di Stato Maggiore della R. Marina, Ministero dell’Aeronautica, 16 October 1937: “[...] cauta e non appariscente vigilanza”; Prefettura di Firenze to MI, DGPS, 16 July 1938.

⁴⁹ Sarfatti, *Mussolini contro gli ebrei*, 47-51; “I provvedimenti legislativi razzisti e antiebraici dell’1-2 settembre.” Legislation promulgated two months later in November 1938 (RDL, 17 November 1938, no. 1728, art. 25, modified the terms to allow foreign Jews married to Italians to remain in Italy beyond 12 March 1939, but Diringer had already made the decision to leave; in mid March 1939, the order for the expulsion was in practice rescinded (Voigt, *Il rifugio precario*, vol. 1, 304-310).

⁵⁰ Teicher, “Da discriminati a rifugiati,” 48-49.

⁵¹ On the aid organizations, see Claus-Dieter Krohn, *Intellectuals in Exile: Refugee Scholars and the New School for Social Research* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993); Giuliana Gemelli, ed., *The “Unacceptables.” American Foundations and Refugee Scholars Between the Two Wars and After* (Brussels-New York: P.I.E.-Peter Lang, 2000); Margaret Lamberti, “The Reception of Refugee Scholars from Nazi Germany in America: Philanthropy and Social Change in Higher Education,” *Jewish Social Studies* 12, no. 3 (2006): 157-192; Jeremy Seabrook, *The Refuge*

five years on, as Diringer's case illustrates, underscore the very harsh realities of an already inundated market as well as the decisive influence of effective patronage.

Diringer addressed his initial efforts to foreign contacts he had established in Florence. He lost no time in writing to Arthur Crofton Sleigh, an English colleague who was lector in English at the Facoltà di Lettere at Florence University and who also taught at the British Institute,⁵² asking Sleigh, then in London on a visit, to contact the SPSL on his behalf.⁵³ Forms were duly dispatched to Florence for him to fill out, and returned to London by early October.⁵⁴ After that, silence. In mid-November, Sleigh, now back in Florence, wrote again to the SPSL in response to a personal request from Diringer, "to plead his case with you."⁵⁵ The reply from David Cleghorn Thomson, general secretary of the SPSL, was hardly encouraging: "We are doing our best to look out for some opening, although I must confess that the position does not look very hopeful at the moment."⁵⁶ Other friends and acquaintances who also contacted the SPSL on Diringer's behalf received a similarly negative response.⁵⁷ Time was running out and the prospects of finding

and the Fortress: Britain and the Flight from Tyranny (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Shula Marks, Paul Weindling and Laura Wintour, eds., *In Defence of Learning. The Plight, Persecution, and Placement of Academic Refugees, 1933-1980s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 2011); Isabella Löhr, "Solidarity and the Academic Community: The Support Networks for Refugee Scholars in the 1930s," *Journal of Modern European History* 12, no.2 (2014): 231-246; Guarnieri, "L'emigrazione intellettuale ebraica dalla Toscana," 265-280.

⁵² Sleigh started teaching at the British Institute in 1925, returning to Florence after the war, and retiring as Vice-Director in 1962. I am grateful to Alyson Price, former archivist at the British Institute in Florence, for her kindness in providing information about Sleigh's career.

⁵³ David Diringer to Arthur Crofton (A. C.) Sleigh, undated, but around mid-September 1938, "Diringer, David," MS, SPSL, 251/2, BL, Oxford, fol. 85.

⁵⁴ Ibid., fol. 84, A. C. Sleigh to The Secretary, SPSL, 19 September 1938. Diringer's completed forms were received by the SPSL on 3 October 1938.

⁵⁵ Ibid., fol. 96, A. C. Sleigh to The Secretary, SPSL, 14 November 1938.

⁵⁶ Ibid., fol. 97, David Cleghorn Thomson to A. C. Sleigh, 19 November 1938.

⁵⁷ Ibid., fol. 108, Esther Simpson to Kathleen Speight, 9 February 1939. Speight completed a second degree in Lettere at Florence University in 1936, and also, like Sleigh, taught English at the British Institute. Another who wrote on Diringer's behalf was Jean Seznec, assistant director of the French Institute in Florence, whose letter to Fritz Saxl, director of the Warburg Institute in London, was forwarded by Saxl to the SPSL (Ibid., fol. 90, copy of letter from David Diringer to Jean Seznec, undated; fol. 91, Gertrud Bing to Esther Simpson, 6 October 1938; fol. 92, Esther Simpson to Gertrud Bing, 7 October 1938); an abortive attempt to interest the Professional Committee for German Jewish Refugees in Diringer's case initiated through an English acquaintance of Diringer's

a placement for him looked decidedly remote. His field of expertise, Semitic epigraphy, was not only narrow, but was also not represented in British universities. And while he was under the misapprehension that this circumstance could further his cause,⁵⁸ it was in reality—and continued to be for the future—more of a hindrance than a help.

Britain however was not the only option, and, if conditions there were decidedly unfavorable, across the Atlantic, the US was seen as having the potential to offer greater opportunity, and the SPSL consistently pursued a policy of actively encouraging refugee scholars to exploit any potential openings and contacts there.⁵⁹ The US was indeed Diringer's stated destination of preference.⁶⁰ To this end, he had been exploiting his own academic contacts there, getting in touch with "many scholars" with whom he had personal contact or who knew him through his publications.⁶¹ And yet, despite his details being forwarded to the EC with a robust recommendation from Cyrus Adler (President of Dropsie College and of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America), it was all to no avail,⁶² and his quest seemed no nearer resolution.

With all roads seemingly closed, Diringer's fortunes were about to undergo a timely upturn in London, thanks to a curious intertwining of Fascist connections in Italy and the British establishment. At the end of January 1939, only some six weeks before the date by which he was obliged to leave Italy, Cleghorn Thomson, general secretary of the SPSL, received a visit on Diringer's behalf from Giorgia

in Florence also came to nothing (Ibid., fols. 98-99, L. E. Whitehorn to The Secretary, SPSL, 19 December 1938; fol. 100, Esther Simpson to L. E. Whitehorn, 21 December 1938; fol. 104, R. Luisada (Comitato assistenza per gli ebrei in Italia) to The Jewish Professional Committee, London, 26 January 1939; fol. 105, A. J. Makover, chairman of the Professional Committee for German Jewish Refugees (signed E. Rosenberg, secretary) to Esther Simpson, 3 February 1939.

⁵⁸ Ibid., fol. 85, David Diringer to A. C. Sleight, undated, but around mid-September 1938.

⁵⁹ See, for example, Annalisa Capristo, "Arnaldo Momigliano e il mancato asilo negli USA (1938-1941). 'I always hope that something will be found in America'," *Quaderni di storia* 63 (2006): 18-19 on the SPSL's exhortation to Momigliano to try to reach the US in November 1939.

⁶⁰ Information sheet, 31 March 1939, "Diringer, David," MS, SPSL, 251/2, BL, Oxford, fol. 128.

⁶¹ Ibid., fol. 361, David Diringer to Joseph Bright Skemp, undated, but received 17 November 1945. All quotations from Diringer's correspondence have been left in his original English.

⁶² David Diringer to Cyrus Adler, 10 November 1938, "Diringer, David," Manuscript and Archives Division (MAD), Emergency Committee in Aid of Displaced Foreign Scholars (EC), I.B. Non-grantees, b. 52, f. 27, New York Public Library (NYPL), New York; Cyrus Adler to Stephen Duggan, 29 November 1938.

Valensin. Her connections with Diringer were forged in Florence through her father, Guido Valensin, an expert in colonial affairs born into the Florentine Jewish elite, the apex of whose career was his appointment in 1936 as ministerial secretary to Alessandro Lessona at the Ministero delle Colonie. Prior to his involvement in Mussolini's government, Valensin had had an academic career, teaching the history of colonialism at the Istituto Cesare Alfieri in Florence, in the same years that Diringer served as secretary of the Institute's offshoot, the Centro di Studi Coloniali.⁶³ Both men had collaborated in the organization of all three congresses of Colonial Studies, and Diringer's friendship with the family may have dated from this time.⁶⁴ More importantly from the point of view of the SPSL, Giorgia Valensin was related through her mother, Countess Gwendoline Balzani, to Lord Hailey, a grandee of British imperialism, who, following an eminent career in India and Africa, had in December 1938 been appointed chairman of the Coordinating Committee for Refugees.⁶⁵ Valensin, who was working in London at the International Board for non-intervention in Spain, was referred to by the SPSL as Lord Hailey's niece, although in reality the relationship was more distant.⁶⁶ The presence however of an advocate with close ties to a figure of the British establishment, who had a special interest in refugees, galvanized the SPSL into action on Diringer's behalf, and proved to be the enabling factor which led to his arrival in Britain.

⁶³ Andrea Giaconi, *La patria in movimento. Guido Valensin tra Toscana, Romagna e popoli migranti* (Pisa: Pacini Editore, 2017), 12-13, 78-79, 93-94; curriculum vitae, undated, "Diringer, David," MS, SPSL, 251/2, fol. 81.

⁶⁴ See notes 31 and 32. Valensin's participation is recorded in *Atti del primo congresso di studi coloniali*, vol. 1, 11 and 14; *Atti del secondo congresso di studi coloniali*, vol. 1, 9 and 11; *Atti del terzo congresso di studi coloniali*, vol. 1, 10. Together with her parents, the young Giorgia is listed among the attendees of the first congress (*Atti del primo congresso di studi coloniali*, vol. 1, 120).

⁶⁵ Judith Tydor Baumel-Schwartz, *Never look back: The Jewish refugee children in Great Britain* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2012), 84. William Malcolm Hailey (1872-1969), Governor of the Punjab and later of the United Provinces, India, and author of *An African Survey* (1938).

⁶⁶ For Giorgia's appointment, which she ascribed to her father's contacts, see Giaconi, *La patria in movimento*, 94 and 140. Lord Hailey's wife, Countess Andreina (Andreola) Balzani (1869-1939) was a first cousin of Giorgia's mother, Gwendoline Balzani: Vittorio Spreti, ed., *Enciclopedia storico-nobiliare italiana*, vol. 1, A-B, (Milan: Enciclopedia storico-nobiliare italiana, 1928) 492-493. Giorgia (1909-1969) became an acclaimed translator, known especially for her translation into Italian of Arthur Waley's English version of Chinese poems (Giorgia Valensin, *Liriche cinesi: 1753 a.c.-1278 d.c.*, with a preface by Eugenio Montale (Turin: G. Einaudi, 1943).

Cleghorn Thomson, who initially failed to recall that the SPSL was already in contact with Diringer and that a few months previously he had personally written to Arthur Sleight stressing how unpromising his prospects for coming to Britain were, now agreed to respond to Valensin's request to try to obtain an invitation for Diringer to come and study in London that would facilitate his departure from Italy and entry to Britain.⁶⁷ In Cleghorn Thomson's opinion, all that was required was "a more or less fictitious invitation" for Diringer "to come and carry on his research in his subject in England,"⁶⁸ one above all that made no offer of financial support. The recipients of Cleghorn Thomson's appeal reacted differently, one, Curt Sigmar Gutkind, not even responding despite a verbal assurance of his willingness to help.⁶⁹ Ellis Minns, recently retired professor of archaeology at Cambridge whom Diringer had listed as a referee on his SPSL form, apparently on the basis of an exchange of offprints following the publication of his 1937 book on the alphabet, did respond, but was troubled by the request and had in turn sought the advice of David Winton Thomas, the newly appointed Regius professor of Hebrew in Cambridge. Although both were in no doubt as to the quality of his work, and both were subsequently to give crucial support to him, neither was in favor of issuing an invitation when so much was unclear about Diringer's future plans. They feared that even if he saw his ultimate destination as being the US, his stay in Britain could nonetheless be prolonged, a situation which would "involve us in a moral responsibility for his maintenance," with the risk of his becoming "a permanent liability." And Minns, to whom Diringer had made an unsuccessful personal approach for help back in November 1938, also drew attention to his suspicions that Diringer was involved in cultural propaganda in the Near East and Abyssinia on behalf of the Fascist regime—suspicions that find some confirmation in Italian police files.⁷⁰ Diringer had indeed, perhaps unwisely, been at pains to

⁶⁷ David Cleghorn Thomson to A. C. Sleight, 19 November 1938, "Diringer, David," MS, SPSL, 251/2, BL, Oxford, fol. 97; David Cleghorn Thomson to Gloria Valensin, 30 January 1939, fol. 103.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, fol. 111, David Cleghorn Thomson to Ellis Minns, 13 February 1939.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, fol. 110, David Cleghorn Thomson to Curt Sigmar Gutkind, 10 February 1939. Gutkind had taught Diringer back in the 1920s when he was lector in German at Florence University and took up a position in Italian at Bedford College, London, in 1936.

⁷⁰ David Winton Thomas to Ellis Minns, 16 February 1939, "Diringer, David," MS, SPSL, 251/2, BL, Oxford, fols. 116-117; Ellis Minns to David Cleghorn Thomson, 18 February 1939, fols. 118-119; Prefettura di Livorno to Prefettura di Firenze, 7 October 1937, "Diringer, Davide," MI, DGPS, DAGR, A4, b. 110, ACS, Rome.

list, in the CV he submitted to the SPSL, the personal audience he had had not only with the King of Italy, but also in the spring of 1938 with Mussolini himself, although he did omit his association with the Istituto fascista dell'Africa italiana.⁷¹ The response from Cambridge thus advocated caution, Minns suggesting to the SPSL that more information be sought about Diringer's financial position before any invitation could be contemplated.⁷²

In the meantime, however, the third recipient, Sir Frederic Kenyon, a former director of the British Museum and at the time secretary of the British Academy, to whom alone in his appeal Cleghorn Thomson had mentioned Diringer's connection with Lord Hailey's "niece," and who in his additional role as executive chairman of the SPSL may well himself have had personal contact with Lord Hailey, had suffered no such qualms and, virtually by return of post, had already issued the all-important "non-committal sort of invitation"⁷³ requested by Cleghorn Thomson. On 13 February, just a month before Diringer had to leave Italy, Sir Frederic wrote to him in the name of the British Academy:

I understand it would facilitate your studies of the early civilisation of Palestine and the origins of the alphabet, if you were able to come to London and examine the materials available in the British Museum and elsewhere. These are subjects in which British scholars are much interested, and on behalf of the British Academy I write to say that a visit from you in order to pursue your studies would be welcome, and that the resources of the British Museum would be open to you.⁷⁴

Cleghorn Thomson may have voiced his agreement with Minns and Winton Thomas that "it is important for us to know that we are not taking on a permanent responsibility for Diringer's maintenance,"⁷⁵ but by now it was too late. Armed

⁷¹ Curriculum vitae, undated, "Diringer, David," MS, SPSL, 251/2, BL, Oxford, fol. 81.

⁷² Ibid., fols. 118-119, Ellis Minns to David Cleghorn Thomson, 18 February 1939.

⁷³ Ibid., fol. 110, David Cleghorn Thomson to Sir Frederic Kenyon, 10 February 1939.

⁷⁴ Ibid., fol. 112, Sir Frederic Kenyon to David Diringer, 13 February 1939.

⁷⁵ Ibid., fol. 120, David Cleghorn Thomson to Ellis Minns, 21 February 1939.

with Sir Frederic's invitation, he was on his way and by the end of March had reached London.⁷⁶

On arrival, Diring set about continuing his research work not only at the British Museum, but also at the recently established Institute of Archaeology attached to the University of London. The Insititute's secretary at the time was Sir Frederic's daughter, the archaeologist Kathleen Kenyon, who then became acting director during the war years.⁷⁷ His collaboration focused on the Hebrew inscriptional material collected by the Wellcome-Marston expedition to Palestine housed at the Institute and would result in a number of publications over the next four years.⁷⁸ The Institute would continue to provide an ongoing base for Diring into the post-war period. However, it did not provide any source of regular funding.⁷⁹ Diring had arrived in Britain without a position to support him. He was "more or less destitute."⁸⁰ He became an immediate financial liability to his new host country that increased when he was joined just before the outbreak of war by his wife, Elena, and seven-year-old daughter, Kedma,⁸¹ and was indeed destined to continue for almost a decade.

"He has thrown himself on the hands of the SPSL,"⁸² and the SPSL was worried. As Esther Simpson, assistant secretary of the SPSL, wrote to Joseph Hertz, the Chief Rabbi, whom Diring had visited as soon as he arrived in London:

We are a little troubled by his case. He came to England before we were able to make any plans for him, and, as a matter of fact, after colleagues in

⁷⁶ Ibid., fol. 121, Godfrey Rolles Driver (professor of Semitic philology, Oxford University) to David Cleghorn Thomson, 27 March 1939.

⁷⁷ Katie Louise Meheux, "'An awfully nice job.' Kathleen Kenyon as Secretary and Acting Director of the University of London Institute of Archaeology, 1935-1948," *Archaeology International*, 21, no. 1, (2018): 122-140.

⁷⁸ David Diring, "Report on wartime activities," undated, "Diring, David," MS, SPSL, 251/2, BL, Oxford, fols. 82-83 (fol. 368, copy), for listing of articles on Hebrew inscriptions, weights and jar-stamps and seals discovered at Tell Ed-Duweir (Lachish) published in the *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* in 1941, 1942 and 1943.

⁷⁹ Ibid., fol. 152, Sir Henry Dale to Archibald Vivian (A.V.) Hill, 4 May 1939 on the exceptional one-off payment of £50 made from Wellcome funds to the SPSL as support for Diring.

⁸⁰ Ibid., fol. 121, Godfrey Rolles Driver to David Cleghorn Thomson, 27 March 1939.

⁸¹ Ibid., fol. 161, David Diring to David Cleghorn Thomson, 1 September 1939.

⁸² Ibid., fol. 123, Godfrey Driver to the Provost of The Queen's College, Oxford, 27 March 1939 (incorrectly dated 29 March).

this country had written confidentially to us that they would not like to undertake an indefinite responsibility for him owing to the difficulty of finding suitable research posts in his subject in this country.⁸³

The Society sought advice from British scholars in his field as to the prospects of Diringer's "becoming absorbed," and the chances of his "obtaining a position within a reasonable period," but received no replies.⁸⁴ It was, as before, Sir Frederic who came to the rescue, conscious maybe that it was his "non-committal" invitation that had enabled Diringer to reach London in the first place. Following her first interview with him, Esther Simpson underlined the urgency of the case and asked for Sir Frederic's recommendation, as executive secretary of the Society, that Diringer be awarded an SPSL grant.⁸⁵ Sir Frederic was happy to oblige,⁸⁶ and in mid-April, a matter of a few weeks after he had arrived, Diringer was duly awarded a six-month grant of £250 per annum.⁸⁷ The favorable treatment he received was in marked contrast to the experience of other refugee scholars in their dealings with the Society and cemented his position as Sir Frederic's protégé, highlighting the crucial mechanism of patronage, in particular that provided by establishment figures, to refugee scholars as they sought to secure a footing in their new environments.

⁸³ Ibid., fol. 141, Esther Simpson to Joseph Hertz, 20 April 1939.

⁸⁴ Ibid., fol. 136, Nancy Searle to Charles Inge, 13 April 1939; fol. 122, Esther Simpson to Godfrey Driver, 28 March 1939.

⁸⁵ Ibid., fol. 129, Esther Simpson to Sir Frederic Kenyon, 3 April 1939.

⁸⁶ Ibid., fol. 131, Sir Frederic Kenyon to Esther Simpson, 4 April 1939; fol. 140, Esther Simpson to Archibald Vivian (A.V.) Hill, 19 April 1939: "Sir Frederic was most anxious that he [Diringer] should be helped."

⁸⁷ Ibid., fol. 139, Nancy Searle to David Diringer, 20 April 1939. For the rates paid by the SPSL, see Philip Davies, "Out of the Archives: Oxford, the SPSL, and 'Literae Humaniores' Refugee Scholars," in *Ark of Civilization*, 81: £250 p.a. was the rate paid by the SPSL to scholars with dependents, although at this stage Diringer's wife and daughter were still in Italy.

“A deserving little man”

“I will never forget what Sir Frederic and yourself have done for me,” was how Diringer expressed himself to Esther Simpson.⁸⁸ He had every reason to be grateful. In contrast to other experts whom the SPSL had approached, Sir Frederic—initially at least—took a more sanguine approach to the likelihood of his finding work in Britain. “Dr. Diringer is a scholar of real ability (I have read a book of his which I find full of learning and scholarship), and I feel sure it will be possible to find work for him.”⁸⁹ Funding would therefore be needed simply “to tide him over the interval.”⁹⁰ At the time of the first grant renewal in September 1939, Sir Frederic recommended an extension on the grounds that Diringer was being considered for a post in the new Institute for Jewish Science which it was planned to establish in Cambridge and would simply need support until the appointment was settled.⁹¹ The SPSL was so sure that Sir Frederic’s word would seal the decision on the grant in his favor that they communicated the good news to him before it became official.⁹² But the post in Cambridge (presumably a reference to Herbert Loewe’s unrealized plans to relocate the Berlin Hochschule to Cambridge)⁹³ failed to materialize, and Diringer continued to have to rely on SPSL support. From now on however, in line with wartime arrangements, the grants were extended every three months on a temporary basis and, from January

⁸⁸ David Diringer to Esther Simpson, 16 December 1942, “Diringer, David,” MS, SPSL, 251/2, BL, Oxford, fol. 300.

⁸⁹ Ibid., fol. 131, Sir Frederic Kenyon to Esther Simpson, 4 April 1939. In 1942, Sir Frederic referred to Diringer as “a deserving little man” Ibid., fol. 291, Sir Frederic Kenyon to Esther Simpson, 1 December 1942.

⁹⁰ Ibid., fol. 131, Sir Frederic Kenyon to Esther Simpson, 4 April 1939.

⁹¹ Ibid., fol. 162, Sir Frederic Kenyon to Esther Simpson, 19 September 1939.

⁹² Ibid., fol. 165, Nancy Searle to David Diringer, 29 September 1939.

⁹³ Richard Fuchs, “The ‘Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums’ in the Period of Nazi Rule. Personal Recollections,” *The Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 12 (1967): 27-28; Christhard Hoffmann and Daniel R. Schwartz, “Early but Opposed – Supported but Late: Two Berlin Seminaries Which Attempted to Move Abroad,” *The Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 36 (1991): 283-295.

1940, paid at the reduced rate of £200 per annum,⁹⁴ placing him in a position of constant uncertainty.

Following Italy's entry into the war on 10 June, Diringer, now classified as an enemy alien by British authorities (despite the revocation of his Italian citizenship as a result of the Italian racial laws), was interned on the Isle of Man for five months and was held at Palace Camp, together with the Italian detainees. He became chairman of the camp's Cultural Committee which organized an educational program of daily lectures and regular courses.⁹⁵ The SPSL's payments were suspended from July to December, although during this period his wife and daughter continued to be given support, and Diringer himself was provided with "pocket money."⁹⁶ The Society meanwhile worked tirelessly to secure the release of the interned refugee scholars in its care. Applications concerning scholars in the humanities were submitted to the Home Office through a special tribunal set up by the British Academy,⁹⁷ and once again it was Sir Frederic, as secretary of the Academy, who personally undertook the appeal on behalf of his protégé.⁹⁸ Diringer was among the first scholars to be recommended by the Academy's tribunal,⁹⁹ and was duly released at the end of November 1940. His SPSL grant was immediately reinstated.¹⁰⁰

As the months became years, the exhortations on the part of the SPSL, first voiced in December 1939,¹⁰¹ that Diringer find alternative sources of income became increasingly forceful, and from mid-1941 the Society sought to make clear to him

⁹⁴ Nancy Searle to David Diringer, 13 December 1939, "Diringer, David," MS, SPSL, 251/2, BL, Oxford, fol. 172.

⁹⁵ Ibid., fols. 82-83, David Diringer, "Report on wartime activities," undated. On British internment policy, see David Cesarani and Tony Kushner, eds., *The internment of aliens in twentieth century Britain* (London: Frank Cass, 1993) and Yvonne Kapp and Margaret Mynatt, *British policy and the refugees, 1933-1941* (London: Frank Cass, 1997).

⁹⁶ Gisela Peiser to Meyer Stephany (Nathan and Adolfe Haendler Charity), 19 September 1941, "Diringer, David," MS, SPSL, 251/2, BL, Oxford, fol. 242.

⁹⁷ Ibid., fol. 194, Esther Simpson to David Diringer, 2 August 1940.

⁹⁸ Ibid., fol. 248, Esther Simpson to David Diringer, 15 October 1941; *New Times and Ethiopia News*, December 14, 1940, 2, "Davide Diringer [...] personally vouched for by Sir Frederic Kenyon."

⁹⁹ Esther Simpson to R.D. Barnett, 4 September 1940, "Diringer, David," MS, SPSL, 251/2, BL, Oxford, fol. 209.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., fol. 218, Esther Simpson to David Diringer, 30 November 1940.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., fol. 172, Nancy Searle to David Diringer, 13 December 1939.

that it was unlikely that their funds would permit a renewal of his grant: “Our committee did not envisage long-term grants, that is why they are anxious that those of our grantees who have been on our books a long time should now become independent.”¹⁰² The state of the SPSL’s own funds was also precarious.¹⁰³ It was at this juncture that the Society remembered an offer previously made by the Nathan and Adolfe Haendler Charity to share the grant, despite the charity being technically barred from giving aid to Italians and, thanks to the help of this timely contribution grant payments could continue.¹⁰⁴ The urgency to find alternative sources of income nonetheless remained. The quest was to prove inconclusive for months to come, despite the continuing support Diringer received from his protector: “Sir Frederic knows all about my efforts and he helped me very much.”¹⁰⁵ In the summer of 1940, just before he was interned, Diringer had delivered three lectures on the history of the alphabet in Oxford, but his attempts to further promote his academic profile, or successfully apply for a university position, came to nothing, despite Sir Frederic’s support.¹⁰⁶ He was equally unsuccessful in finding paid employment outside academia. The Overseas Service of the BBC was for Diringer, as for other refugee scholars, an obvious port of call, and he too made an attempt to obtain a job there at the beginning of 1941.

There are some BBC announcers who don’t know the language in which they announce, and pronounce so badly the foreign names [...] that I cannot believe that they have been engaged by the BBC without recommendations, while I myself have not been able to get a job there.

He was sure he possessed the “required qualifications,” and yet once more he was to be disappointed even though Sir Frederic had sent what Diringer described,

¹⁰² Ibid., fol. 238, Esther Simpson to David Diringer, 4 September 1941.

¹⁰³ Ibid., fol. 236, Esther Simpson to David Diringer, 30 August 1941.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., fol. 130, Nancy Searle to David Diringer, 4 April 1939; fol. 240, Gisela Peiser to Miss E. Rosenberg, Jewish Professional Committee, 9 September 1941; fol. 242, Gisela Peiser to Meyer Stephany, 19 September 1941; fol. 326, Agenda Item No. 6, undated, but February 1948.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., fol. 237, David Diringer to Esther Simpson, 3 September 1941.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., fols. 219 and 229, David Diringer to Esther Simpson, 5 December 1940 and 4 May 1941 on attempts to arrange lectures in Cambridge; fol. 249, David Diringer to Esther Simpson, 18 October 1941 on application as a temporary resident tutor at Bristol University.

mistakenly translating directly from the Italian, as a “hot recommendation.”¹⁰⁷ These and other efforts were to prove ineffectual.¹⁰⁸ Indeed, as the SPSL was all too aware, “Diringer has been trying hard for months to find a paid job, but he does not seem to be successful.”¹⁰⁹

Meanwhile, Diringer continued in vain to try to find academic openings in the US. Kalman Friedman, a former colleague of Polish origin from Florence, had approached the EC on his behalf to no avail,¹¹⁰ while in the summer of 1940 the American Academy of Jewish Research raised the possibility of appointing him as a research fellow. But funding was not forthcoming¹¹¹ and discussions with the Rockefeller Foundation also came to nothing.¹¹² By now it was too late and a move to the US was no longer seen as feasible. As the EC concluded in the spring of 1942, “[...] we see no means of assisting him at the present time. It is practically impossible for us to enable scholars who are still in Europe to reach this country.”¹¹³ Diringer was thrown back to reliance on the SPSL that had been funding him all along. The support he received did indeed provide an essential safety net, but it was nonetheless insufficient to protect Diringer and his family from financial hardship. His wife and daughter had left their north London flat for a cheaper alternative in the country during the months Diringer was interned,¹¹⁴ and it was there—outside the village of Ashley Green in Buckinghamshire, to the west of London—that the family continued to live after

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., fols. 223 and 225, David Diringer to Esther Simpson, 14 January 1941 and 25 February 1941.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., fols. 225, 233 and 252, David Diringer to Esther Simpson, 25 February 1941, 31 May 1941 and 3 December 1941.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., fol. 240, Gisela Peiser to Miss E. Rosenberg, 9 September 1941.

¹¹⁰ Interview Memorandum, 9 November 1939, “Diringer, David,” MAD, EC, I.B. Non-grantees, b. 52, f. 27, NYPL, New York. Kalman Friedman had been appointed Chief Rabbi in Florence before being forced to leave Italy in the wake of the racial legislation.

¹¹¹ Ibid., Ralph Marcus (Corresponding Secretary, American Academy for Jewish Research) to Betty Drury, 21 May 1940; Betty Drury to Ralph Marcus, 2 July 1940.

¹¹² David Diringer to Esther Simpson, 3 September 1941, “Diringer, David,” MS, SPSL, 251/2, BL, Oxford, fol. 237; fol. 238, Esther Simpson to David Diringer, 4 September 1941; Bertha Katz to EC, 13 January 1942, “Diringer, David,” MAD, EC, I.B. Non-grantees, b. 52, f. 27, NYPL, New York; Betty Drury to David Stevens (Director “The Humanities,” Rockefeller Foundation), 20 February 1942; John Marshall (Associate Director “The Humanities,” Rockefeller Foundation) to Betty Drury, 26 February 1942.

¹¹³ Ibid., Betty Drury to Bertha Katz, 3 March 1942.

¹¹⁴ Elena Diringer to Esther Simpson, 29 October 1940, “Diringer, David,” MS, SPSL, 251/2, BL, Oxford, fols. 212-213.

his release. Their problems however persisted. In the summer of 1941, Diringer applied to the Welfare Department of the Jewish Refugees' Committee for clothes for his wife and daughter;¹¹⁵ the local Buckinghamshire refugee committee reported at the end of 1942 that the family was "finding it very difficult to live on the grant which they are receiving."¹¹⁶

And yet it had been the previous spring, just as the SPSL had again acknowledged the extreme difficulty Diringer was experiencing in securing employment,¹¹⁷ that Sir Frederic's efforts on his behalf finally began to bear fruit. Sir Frederic had spoken about him in early spring 1942 to a fellow archaeologist, Raleigh Radford, who had been director of the British School in Rome from 1936 to 1939, and who by this stage of the war was at the Political Intelligence Department (PID) of the Foreign Office. "Sir Frederic hopes that Raleigh Radford will make use of my services. I would be quite happy!" Diringer informed Esther Simpson, reflecting that Sir Frederic had done "all his best on my behalf."¹¹⁸ Radford proposed a part-time arrangement by which Diringer would assist another Italian exile, a close friend of his, engaged "on important war work the nature of which could not be made public."¹¹⁹ By September 1942, he was "(precariously) employed" by PID,¹²⁰ his position improving the following spring when he was seconded to the Political Warfare Executive (PWE).¹²¹ Hitherto his pay had been meager and, at Sir Frederic's suggestion, the SPSL had continued payment of their grant.¹²² But his

¹¹⁵ Ibid., fol. 235, Secretary Jewish Refugees Committee, Welfare Department to Esther Simpson, 9 July 1941; fol. 234, Esther Simpson to Secretary Jewish Refugees Committee, Welfare Department, 11 July 1941. The exchange elicited a somewhat sharp response from Esther Simpson: "I am afraid we know nothing whatever about any arrangements for his obtaining clothes; our own grants are confined to research."

¹¹⁶ Ibid., fol. 301, Meyer Stephany to Gisela Perutz (née Peiser), 22 December 1942.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., fol. 256, Gisela Peiser to Meyer Stephany, 4 March 1942.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., fol. 260, David Diringer to Esther Simpson, 6 March 1942.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., fol. 264, Raleigh Redford to Sir Frederic Kenyon, 24 April 1942.

¹²⁰ Ibid., fol. 277, Sir Frederic Kenyon to Esther Simpson, 22 September 1942; fol. 280, David Diringer to Esther Simpson, 21 September 1942, for other employment possibilities he was meanwhile continuing to pursue.

¹²¹ Ibid., fol. 318, David Diringer to Esther Simpson, 28 April 1943. An important part of PID's work involved producing weekly intelligence summaries, while at the same time providing cover for PWE after that entity was established in 1941. In April 1943, the production of intelligence summaries was passed to the newly-formed Foreign Office Research Department (FORD), where Diringer found short-term temporary employment immediately after the end of the war.

¹²² Ibid., fol. 286, Sir Frederic Kenyon to Esther Simpson, 8 October 1942.

new position, although still part-time, was paid at a rate of just over £350 per annum.¹²³ At the end of May 1943, the SPSL was finally in a position to suspend the maintenance it paid him.¹²⁴ The Society had been supporting him and his family for a little over four years. “It will be one of the happiest days of my life when I shall be able to write to you that I [...] renounce to continue the grant of the Society,” he had written back at the end of 1941,¹²⁵ and eighteen months later his relief must have been palpable. He now had a job, albeit a non-academic one, and would continue in post, working in intelligence until the end of the war.

The Immediate Aftermath of War

At the cessation of hostilities Diringer’s job was immediately terminated and the unresolved challenges of his circumstances re-presented themselves. He had been promised his situation would ease after the war,¹²⁶ but reality was to prove otherwise. “In short, the whole situation of mine seems to be black as coal.”¹²⁷ He had no source of income.¹²⁸ He was no closer to reaching his goal of obtaining an academic position, and indeed his involvement in war work had inevitably impinged on his ability to continue research work, compromising his quest still further.¹²⁹ The new configuration of the post-war world widened his range of possible destinations to include, besides Britain and the US, Palestine and still more distant locations, as well indeed as Italy itself. But now his endeavours would be played out against the uncertainties of post-war reconstruction. This was particularly true as regards the possibility of a return to Italy, where his experience serves as testimony to the vexed fortunes of Italian academics who wished to resume their careers there. And everywhere, as he went forward, the crucial

¹²³ Ibid., fol. 318, David Diringer to Esther Simpson, 28 April 1943.

¹²⁴ Ibid., fol. 319, Esther Simpson to David Diringer, 1 May 1943.

¹²⁵ Ibid., fol. 252, David Diringer to Esther Simpson, 3 December 1941.

¹²⁶ Ibid., fol. 361, David Diringer to Joseph Bright Skemp, undated, but received 17 November 1945.

¹²⁷ Ibid., fol. 358, David Diringer to Joseph Bright Skemp, 12 November 1945.

¹²⁸ Ibid., fol. 133, David Diringer to Sir Frederic Kenyon, 13 June 1945.

¹²⁹ Ibid., fol. 324, David Diringer to Esther Simpson, 27 May 1943; fols. 82-83 (fol. 368 copy), David Diringer, “Report of wartime activities,” undated.

importance of patronage and personal support, or indeed the lack of them, continued to be paramount.

Italy: 1945-1946. A Frustrated Return

Diringer's acquired Italian citizenship may have been revoked by the racial legislation, but he had been interned in Britain as an Italian, and he had an Italian wife and child. And he had continued moreover to foster his Italian connections throughout the war—not only through his intelligence work for the British government, but also through his membership of the Free Italy Movement.¹³⁰ There was an obvious logic in trying to resume his career in newly liberated Italy. Already in 1944, in one of the first acts of the newly liberated zone of Italy, a legislative foundation for the restoration of citizenship to those from whom it had been revoked in 1938 had been established,¹³¹ and in the August his right to exercise the *libera docenza* had been restored.¹³² It must have seemed that a framework for return was being set in motion—and the SPSL, initially at least, favored the option¹³³—and yet there would prove to be an abyss between expectation and its potential realization.

This was not for want of trying. Immediately at war's end, Diringer took steps to pursue possibilities in Italy, putting out feelers to his old university in Florence

¹³⁰ Ibid. I am greatly indebted to Lucio Sponza for confirming the presence of Prof. D. Diringer (sic) at the meeting held on 26 July 1941 to re-launch the Free Italy Movement: Foreign Office (FO), 371/29937, R. 7474/168/22, Public Record Office, National Archives, London. The meeting is discussed in his book, *Divided Loyalties. Italians in Britain during the Second World War* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2000), 176-177. On talks Diringer gave for the Italian section of the BBC (incorrectly listed as E. Diringer) in the summer of 1941, see Maura Piccialuti Caprioli, ed., *Radio Londra 1940-1945. Inventario delle trasmissioni per l'Italia*, vol. 1 (Rome: Ministero per i Beni Culturali ed Ambientali, Pubblicazioni degli Archivi di Stato, 1976), 112, 125, and 128.

¹³¹ Regio Decreto-legge (RDL), 20 January 1944, no. 25, art. 2, given legislative force by the Decreto Legislativo Luogotenenziale, 5 October 1944, no. 252.

¹³² For the ministerial decree of 8 August 1944 restoring the rights of dismissed *liberi docenti*: Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione to Ministero degli Affari Esteri, 31 July 1946, "Diringer, David," MPI, DGIS, Liberi Docenti, 3a serie (1930-1950), b. 186, ACS, Rome. See also Pelini and Pavan, *La doppia epurazione*, 196, note 2.

¹³³ Joseph Bright Skemp to David Diringer, 19 September 1945, "Diringer, David," MS, SPSL, 251/2, BL, Oxford, fol. 356: "I do nevertheless think you should look to an eventual return to Italy as the right solution."; fol. 360, 13 November 1945: "I still think that the Italian prospects are the best."

and the Oriental Faculty in Rome. He did not however make a direct approach, but, supported by the SPSL and Sir Frederic Kenyon, went through the channel offered by Edoardo Ruffini, an academic lawyer with exemplary anti-Fascist credentials, who had arrived in London as cultural attaché to the Italian Representation in January 1945, and who was charged with establishing contact with Italian academics who had found sanctuary from the Fascist regime in Britain.¹³⁴ It soon became clear, however, that conditions in Italy precluded any possibility of an immediate return and Diringer was advised to wait.¹³⁵ Moreover, as the SPSL acknowledged, Diringer “did not actually occupy a chair in Florence”—he was a *libero docente incaricato*—and the situation in Italy was “very difficult for professors,” let alone for their non-tenured junior colleagues.¹³⁶ The particular difficulties faced by younger scholars only at the start of their professional advancement when they lost their positions in Italy have been acknowledged in recent literature surrounding the question of return,¹³⁷ and in Diringer’s case, as with other foreign Jews, these were compounded by the need to re-establish their status as Italian citizens. In addition, he seems to have been unable in the new post-war reality to draw on a powerful support network of Italian academics willing to promote his cause.¹³⁸

Diringer did however still have former Fascist connections on whom he could call, and their support was marshaled in an attempt to obtain recognition of his *libera docenza* and readmittance to his university teaching. In early 1946, he made a direct appeal to the Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione in Rome. He had been forced to

¹³⁴ Ibid., fol. 337, David Diringer to Joseph Bright Skemp, 29 June 1945; fol. 339, Joseph Bright Skemp to Edoardo Ruffini, 2 July 1945; fol. 341, Sir Frederic Kenyon to Joseph Bright Skemp, 5 July 1945. Ruffini was, together with his father Francesco, one of only twelve university professors who had lost their positions in Italy by refusing to sign the Fascist oath of allegiance.

¹³⁵ Ibid., fol. 356, Joseph Bright Skemp to David Diringer, 19 September 1945; fol. 358, David Diringer to Joseph Bright Skemp, 12 November 1945: “Sir Frederic Kenyon [...] does not see any possibility of my returning to Italy in the near future.”

¹³⁶ Ibid., fol. 374, Joseph Bright Skemp to Harold Henry Rowley, 15 December 1945. Diringer was *incaricato* by virtue of his teaching at the Facoltà di Magistero.

¹³⁷ Guarnieri, *Intellectuals displaced from Fascist Italy*, introductory section, “Intellectual emigration” stresses the challenges faced by the younger generation. See also, Maria Zevi, “Dati statistici” in *Conseguenze culturali delle leggi razziali in Italia, Atti dei Convegni Lincei 84* (Rome: Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 1990), 59-60.

¹³⁸ Guido Mazzoni who had written the foreword to Diringer’s 1937 volume, *L’alfabeto nella storia della civiltà*, had died in 1943.

flee to England “where he currently lives with no means of support and without a fixed position” and voiced his confidence that his request be regarded with benevolence in order to repair “at least partially the grave damage suffered by the undersigned.”¹³⁹ Diringer’s correspondence with the SPSL reveals the background to this initiative that seems to have been prompted by the orientalist Enrico Cerulli who had made a personal approach on Diringer’s behalf to Rodolfo Micacchi, at the time head of the section of university studies at the Ministry and personal secretary to the Minister.¹⁴⁰ Both these men had been heavily involved in colonial administration under the Fascist regime,¹⁴¹ and most likely Diringer’s connections with them (as with Guido Valensin) went back to his involvement with the Centro di Studi Coloniali.¹⁴² It is not surprising, perhaps, that he sought to conceal these contacts from Ruffini, instructing the SPSL to remain silent about them in their dealings with him.¹⁴³ Several months after Diringer’s approach to the Ministry, it emerged that Florence University had not taken any action when initially informed of his formal reinstatement as *libero docente*, and he was now advised to apply directly to the university since decisions on the distribution of teaching duties rested with the relevant faculty.¹⁴⁴ At this point the documentary trail falls

¹³⁹ David Diringer to Ministro della Pubblica Istruzione, 15 February 1946, “Diringer, David,” MPI, DGIS, Liberi Docenti, 3a serie (1930-1950), b. 186, ACS, Rome: “[...] dove vive tuttora senza mezzi di sussistenza e senza un posto fisso”; “... almeno parzialmente i gravi danni sofferti dal sottoscritto stesso.”

¹⁴⁰ David Diringer to Joseph Bright Skemp, 27 February 1946, “Diringer, David,” MS, SPSL, 251/2, BL, Oxford, fol. 389. Diringer also hoped for progress on the possibility of employment at the Italian Cultural Institute in London whose establishment was another of Ruffini’s projects.

¹⁴¹ Enrico Cerulli had been appointed Vice Governor General of Italian East Africa in 1937; Rodolfo Micacchi, a specialist in colonial educational policy, had been head of the Office for Schools and Archaeology in the Ministero delle Colonie.

¹⁴² Both Cerulli and Micacchi were members of the *Comitato ordinatore* for the first Congress of Colonial Studies (1931) in the organization of which Diringer (see note 31) was also involved: *Atti del primo congresso di studi coloniali*, vol. 1, 10.

¹⁴³ David Diringer to Joseph Bright Skemp, 27 February 1946, “Diringer, David,” MS, SPSL, 251/2, BL, Oxford, fol. 389.

¹⁴⁴ Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione to Ministero degli Affari Esteri, charged with communicating directly with Diringer in Britain, (copy sent to the Rettore, University of Florence), 31 July 1946, “Diringer, David,” MPI, DGIS, Liberi Docenti, 3a serie (1930-1950), b. 186, ACS, Rome.

silent: Diringer's personal files in the Ministry and Florence University contain no indication of any further developments.¹⁴⁵

US and Palestine: 1945-1946. Two More Frustrated Moves

If Diringer's plans to return to Italy were no closer to being realized, and indeed were doomed, despite further attempts, to remain unrealized in the years to come, the return of peace did not ease his chances in the US either. He questioned whether it had not been a mistake to come to London in the first place, since his removal from the dangers he would have faced in continental Europe to the (relative) safety of Britain had meant he was not considered an urgent priority for a position in the US. Had he been able to reach the US in person—he had been told—he would have been able to find an opening. The post-war climate was also different. American universities were overcrowded with refugee scholars, and Diringer also sensed that feelings of sympathy towards them had cooled: "I can hardly believe that they will consider other candidates, unless the suggestion came from some very important personality or Society."¹⁴⁶ He was correct to focus on the need for effective patronage and his own lack of it, and approached his protector Sir Frederic as early as June 1945, asking the SPSL to act directly on his behalf.¹⁴⁷ The Society advocated the need for a personal contact in the US—"then perhaps we could help"¹⁴⁸—but Diringer had already exhausted all his own contacts to no effect, and Cyrus Adler, who had voiced strong support for him to the EC in 1938, had died back in 1940. It was left to the SPSL to contact Winton Thomas in Cambridge for suggestions.¹⁴⁹ Back in 1938, Winton Thomas, together with the then Ellis, now Sir Ellis, Minns, had not welcomed the prospect of Diringer's arrival in Britain, but he was now prepared—as was Sir Ellis—to act

¹⁴⁵ Ibid. and "Fascicolo carriera libero docente di David Diringer," Sezione docenti, ASUFI, Florence.

¹⁴⁶ David Diringer to Joseph Bright Skemp, undated, but received 17 November 1945, "Diringer, David," MS, SPSL, 251/2, BL, Oxford, fol. 361.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., fol. 333, David Diringer to Sir Frederic Kenyon, 13 June 1945.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., fol. 360, Joseph Bright Skemp to David Diringer, 13 November 1945.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., fol. 363, Joseph Bright Skemp to David Diringer, 19 November 1945.

more benevolently, offering him advice and support that would lead eventually, after a lengthy wait of a further three years, to his appointment at Cambridge. Sadly for Diringer, neither of Winton Thomas's contacts reacted positively, William F. Albright at Johns Hopkins (whom Diringer had met in Palestine in 1932) being particularly critical, underlining the problems deriving from his field of study:

The trouble with a field like epigraphy is that, except in classical and European studies—and usually, I believe, there—it is ancillary. Dr. Diringer's work does not make him a natural candidate for the kind of post in Judaica or Semitic Languages for which there are openings. Moreover, until the first-class young refugee scholars we still have unplaced in this country, have posts, I should very much regret to see further competition from abroad.¹⁵⁰

In July 1946, the SPSL informed Diringer of the “negative response” they had received from the US.¹⁵¹ Once again, his passage across the Atlantic was blocked. A similar lack of support beleaguered Diringer's efforts to find a position at the Hebrew University in Palestine, where he had once received “certain promises” that “there should be some opening for a Hebrew epigraphist.”¹⁵² Once again, he discussed with Sir Frederic how the SPSL might promote his cause.¹⁵³ But the SPSL was reluctant to act, on the grounds that the university had no money, and the little funding available was being directed into medical and scientific faculties.¹⁵⁴ Conditions in Jerusalem were too unsettled, and he was forced to accept that, “[...] at present, there is no hope for [me] to go to Palestine.”¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., fol. 397, William F. Albright to Joseph Bright Skemp, 6 July 1946; fol. 444, “Dr. David Diringer. Contacts in the United States,” undated, but spring 1947, on the negative response of Winton Thomas's other contact, John A. Wilson at the University of Chicago.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., fol. 401, Ilse Ursell to David Diringer, 27 July 1946.

¹⁵² Ibid., fol. 406, David Diringer to Ilse Ursell, 29 August 1946.

¹⁵³ Ibid., fol. 329, Sir Frederic Kenyon to Joseph Bright Skemp, 5 June 1945.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., fol. 363, Joseph Bright Skemp to David Diringer, 19 November 1945; fol. 374, Joseph Bright Skemp to Harold Henry Rowley, 15 December 1945.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., fol. 401, Ilse Ursell to David Diringer, 27 July 1946; fol. 402, David Diringer to Ilse Ursell, 11 August 1946.

Britain: 1945-1946. Ongoing Frustration

If Diringer's attempts to move away from Britain remained unrealized, conditions in his host country at the end of the war were no more likely to offer an immediate solution to his plight after his position in intelligence was terminated. He found himself once more with no income.¹⁵⁶ Yet again, it was Sir Frederic Kenyon who marshaled the SPSL to reinstate his grant.¹⁵⁷ But the SPSL's assistance continued to be given on a temporary three-month basis, the Society reiterating the hope that their payments to him could soon be terminated.¹⁵⁸ Once again, however, apart from two interludes when Diringer found short-term employment as an offshoot from his intelligence work,¹⁵⁹ this hope was to prove unfounded, and he—and his family—continued to be a charge on the Society's funds.

Diringer's search for a position in Britain was now played out in the challenging conditions of post-war reconstruction. The outlook looked bleak. He sounded out Herbert Danby and Godfrey Rolles Driver in Oxford, as well as Winton Thomas in Cambridge, but "realised from their replies that I can hardly expect any post in my field."¹⁶⁰ Even Sir Frederic Kenyon, who had originally been more optimistic, now acknowledged that it would not "be easy for me to get a chair in Great Britain on an oriental subject."¹⁶¹ The main problem was that his research interests did "not fit in under any of the standard university headings,"¹⁶² but a vitiating factor was also a bias in appointments in his area of study towards

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., fol. 333, David Diringer to Sir Frederic Kenyon, 13 June 1945.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., fol. 329, Sir Frederic Kenyon to Joseph Bright Skemp, 5 June 1945.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., fol. 334, Joseph Bright Skemp to Sir Frederic Kenyon, 27 June 1945; fol. 331, Joseph Bright Skemp to Sir Ellis Minns, 18 June 1945.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., fol. 326, Agenda Item No. 6, undated, but February 1948: Diringer worked for a few months until November 1945 at the Foreign Office Research Department and again in the summer of 1946 as joint editor of the weekly newspaper *Il Corriere del Sabato*, produced under the auspices of the Political Intelligence Department for Italian prisoners of war. On *Il Corriere del sabato*, see Sponza, *Divided Loyalties*, 230, 265-269; Lucio Sponza, "La BBC 'in bianco' e 'in nero.' La propaganda britannica per l'Italia nella seconda guerra mondiale," *StoriAmestre* (2013): 8-11.

¹⁶⁰ David Diringer to Joseph Bright Skemp, undated, but received 17 November 1945, "Diringer, David," MS, SPSL, 251/2, BL, Oxford, fol. 361.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., fol. 358, David Diringer to Joseph Bright Skemp, 12 November 1945.

¹⁶² Ibid., fol. 398, Ilse Ursell to William F. Albright, 17 July 1946.

clergymen (true also in the US), as well as the very fact of being a foreigner.¹⁶³ The blunt conclusion of the SPSL was that Diringer had no prospects in British academia,¹⁶⁴ their analysis borne out by the failure of a number of applications he made between late 1945 and the beginning of 1947.¹⁶⁵

Diringer continued meanwhile to use the London Institute of Archaeology as his base. If no appointment was forthcoming despite, as the SPSL acknowledged, his making every conceivable effort to find suitable employment,¹⁶⁶ he could at least hope for the chance to deliver lectures to further promote his profile. He elicited the support of the SPSL, and a lecture series was duly organised in Manchester in the spring and summer of 1946 through a contact suggested to the SPSL by Winton Thomas.¹⁶⁷ Any academic success, however modest, must have been welcome. And there were others too. At the beginning of 1946, he was elected a member of the Old Testament Society which afforded him the useful opportunity of “getting to know most leading scholars in his own line in this country.”¹⁶⁸ Most importantly, after a series of rejections, he had, in the autumn of 1945, been awarded a contract with the publisher Hutchinson for a book on the history of the alphabet. The crucial intervention here had been that of Sir Ellis Minns, who now, like Winton Thomas, put aside his previous misgivings about Diringer’s

¹⁶³ Ibid., fol. 361, David Diringer to Joseph Bright Skemp, undated, but received 17 November 1945; fol. 440, Id. to Ilse Ursell, 3 May 1947; fol. 358, David Diringer to Joseph Bright Skemp, 12 November 1945.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., fol. 383, Joseph Bright Skemp to William F. Albright, 15 February 1946.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., fol. 358, David Diringer to Joseph Bright Skemp, 12 November 1945 on failure to create a new section on the history of writing at the British Museum; fol. 395, David Diringer to Joseph Bright Skemp, 8 April 1946 and fol. 399, David Diringer to Ilse Ursell, 26 July 1946 on unsuccessful application for Chair of Oriental Studies at the London School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS); fol. 402, David Diringer to Ilse Ursell, 11 August 1946, on discussions with Winton Thomas regarding the upcoming position in Rabbinics at Cambridge; fol. 418, David Diringer to Ilse Ursell, 7 February 1947, on failed applications to Leeds University and for a position in Italian at Edinburgh.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., fol. 393, Joseph Bright Skemp to David Diringer, 2 April 1946.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., fol. 367, David Diringer to Joseph Bright Skemp, 26 November 1945; fol. 371, Joseph Bright Skemp to David Diringer, 4 December 1945; fol. 423, David Winton Thomas to Ilse Ursell, 5 March 1947; fol. 381, David Diringer to Joseph Bright Skemp, 10 January 1946. Later on, Diringer also joined a panel of lecturers in the Department of Linguistics at SOAS (Ibid., fols. 464 and 521, David Diringer to Ilse Ursell, 14 June 1947 and 22 January 1948). In addition he gave a course of lectures at Jews’ College.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., fol. 377, Information sheet, 5 January 1946; fol. 423, David Winton Thomas to Ilse Ursell, 5 March 1947.

arrival in Britain, and set about helping him. It would indeed be Sir Ellis who would write the foreword to the volume that went to press in early 1947.¹⁶⁹ Meanwhile, Diringer worried about how he was going to write the book, “having my mind occupied with so many other, economic and financial, matters.”¹⁷⁰ Diringer was not alone however in his worry, as the SPSL was becoming increasingly concerned about his ongoing dependence on their grants. In the summer of 1946, the Society’s Allocation Committee began to suggest other employment options, outside his field of academic expertise. He had after all been registered with the Labour Exchange, the Appointments Department of the Ministry of Labour and the Central Register since his release from internment.¹⁷¹ With his knowledge of various languages, could he not obtain an appointment as a teacher of languages in a technical college or by giving evening classes? His language qualifications might also make his services attractive to UNESCO which was in the process of setting up a small administrative staff in London, and Sir Frederic’s support was duly enlisted to write a personal recommendation to Julian Huxley. The fact that Diringer was technically an Italian national and not a citizen of an allied government was problematic and nothing came of the initiative, although he was still hopeful in 1947 that the peace treaty with Italy—and also the forthcoming publication of his book—might yet facilitate an opening for him.¹⁷² Diringer clearly appreciated the seriousness of his situation, agreeing “wholeheartedly to any temporary or permanent, whole-time or part-time post.”¹⁷³ And yet he still clung tenaciously to self-belief in his scholarly attainments: “[...] I still think that my qualifications and my publications, which are quite known, do entitle me to some opening.” And again, “I frankly think that my publications in Hebrew Epigraphy are as important as those of any scholar; and, therefore, I do not know why I should not be able to get a post in this important field of study.”¹⁷⁴

¹⁶⁹ *The Alphabet: A Key to the History of Mankind* was published by Hutchinson in 1948.

¹⁷⁰ David Diringer to Joseph Bright Skemp, undated, but received 17 November 1945, “Diringer, David,” MS, SPSL, 251/2, BL, Oxford, fol. 361; fol. 419, David Diringer to Ilse Ursell, 14 February 1947.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, fol. 428, “Notes on David Diringer,” 25 February 1947; fol. 326, Agenda Item No. 6, undated, but February 1948.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, fol. 405, Ilse Ursell to David Diringer, 27 August 1946; fols. 410, 414 and 495, David Diringer to Ilse Ursell, 9 October 1946, 2 November 1946 and 21 September 1947.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, fol. 406, David Diringer to Ilse Ursell, 29 August 1946 (underlining in original).

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

Reality for him however was hard. “I feel it very hard to live on charity,”¹⁷⁵ and in any event the payment of just over £20 per month from the SPSL grant was simply not enough to maintain his family.¹⁷⁶

Crisis: 1947-1948

Up to this juncture, in response fundamentally to Sir Frederic Kenyon’s backing, the SPSL had been steadfast in its ongoing funding of Diringer and his family, despite the continuous exhortations to find employment. But by early 1947 this commitment had been in place for nearly eight years, and the SPSL now took steps to end their financial responsibility for him, extending his grant by one month only instead of the usual three.¹⁷⁷ Although, as the denouement would demonstrate, the role played by Diringer’s supporters continued to be crucial to his ultimate success, in the immediate term their analysis of his chances was hardly encouraging. For both Winton Thomas and Sir Frederic Kenyon, whose advice the SPSL sought, the constant *leitmotiv* was the narrowness of his specialty. “There has in recent years been no vacant University post for which he could have been seriously considered,” opined Winton Thomas.¹⁷⁸ Sir Frederic justly recalled that he had been interested in Diringer from the first, and had “been anxious to do anything [I] could for him.” But, he too agreed that “[...] it seems hopeless to find a place for him,” before adding: “His command of English is not good, and does not seem to get any better, and this restricts his acceptability as either a writer or a lecturer.”¹⁷⁹

If the likelihood of Diringer obtaining a position in Britain was remote, there still remained the US with its greater provision of specifically Jewish institutions of learning, and the SPSL now took the initiative in pursuing this option on his behalf, advice coalescing around an approach to the Hebrew Union College

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., fol. 389, David Diringer to Joseph Bright Skemp, 27 February 1946.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., fol. 421, David Diringer to Ilse Ursell, 1 March 1947.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., fol. 420, Ilse Ursell to David Diringer, 25 February 1947.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., fol. 423, David Winton Thomas to Ilse Ursell, 5 March 1947.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., fol. 426, Sir Frederic Kenyon to Ilse Ursell, 23 March 1947.

(HUC) and Dropsie College.¹⁸⁰ The Society also made a final attempt to explore possibilities for him in Palestine, contacting the London-based Friends of the Hebrew University.¹⁸¹ By the summer of 1947, it was clear, however, that both these avenues had proved fruitless,¹⁸² and the SPSL was seriously concerned about maintaining its financial commitments to Diringer. Back in the spring, Sir Frederic had prevailed upon the Allocation Committee of the SPSL to continue his grant, declaring himself “very sorry to abandon him to his fate” and trusting that the Committee would recognize how he had really tried to help himself. “One can only hope something will turn up before the funds of the SPSL are exhausted.”¹⁸³ The Society did agree to a further three-month grant, but when this came up for renewal at the end of June 1947, the risk of his becoming a permanent liability on their resources, one that could continue “to the end of his days,”¹⁸⁴ prompted the SPSL to adopt a more stringent attitude towards him. Diringer was now informed that the grant would be terminated at the end of following September. He was being given three months’ notice to find work outside his academic field: “The general opinion of the Committee is that it would not be in your interests to continue this grant very much longer even if the Society could afford to do so as your value in the general labor market will decrease the older you become.”¹⁸⁵ Diringer was distraught, and it took him nearly a fortnight to respond: “The letter was a such a shock that I did not know what to say.” He begged the Committee to reconsider and immediately contacted his protector, Sir Frederic,¹⁸⁶ who sailed to his defense: “Might he not continue to go on as long as we have funds to spend? Is there any more deserving object to spend them on? It is not his fault that he has not got employment elsewhere. He has been continually trying; and it is really rather illusory to suppose that he might get employment outside the academic field. He really could not become a miner.”¹⁸⁷ The Society continued to argue that

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., fol. 448, notes on telephone conversation with Redcliffe Salaman, 12 May 1947; fol. 450, Isidore Epstein to Ilse Ursell, 19 May 1947.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., fol. 445, Ilse Ursell to Walter Zander, 31 March 1947.

¹⁸² Ibid., fol. 459, Julian Morgenstern (HUC) to Ilse Ursell, 26 May 1947; fol. 476, Abraham Neuman (Dropsie) to Ilse Ursell, 2 July 1947; fol. 438, Walter Zander to Ilse Ursell, 8 April 1947.

¹⁸³ Ibid., fol. 426, Sir Frederic Kenyon to Ilse Ursell, 23 March 1947.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., fol. 479, Ilse Ursell to Sir Frederic Kenyon, 21 July 1947.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., fol. 466, Ilse Ursell to David Diringer, 30 June 1947.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., fol. 470, David Diringer to Ilse Ursell, 12 July 1947.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., fol. 478, Sir Frederic Kenyon to Ilse Ursell, 18 July 1947.

it would be better for him to compete for posts in the open labor market before he reached the age of fifty, but they did agree to a short reprieve, extending the grant for a further month to the end of October 1947.¹⁸⁸ In the event, the Society agreed to further monthly extensions through November and December 1947, before discontinuing the grant—temporarily, as it turned out—from the beginning of 1948.¹⁸⁹

All this time, Diringier had been continuing his own quest for an opening. He considered widening the breadth of his field of scholarship, but his main hope was that the forthcoming publication of his book would boost his prospects, seeing it as “the best testimonial of my research work.”¹⁹⁰ He had, meanwhile, carried on pursuing possibilities, however remote his chances of success, all over the world—in Australia and Latin America as well as the US, including the UN, despite the fact that Italy, whose citizenship Diringier held, was not yet a member of the organization.¹⁹¹ It was indeed these pending applications that lay behind SPSL’s leniency in continuing its grant. Sadly for him, the most promising opening was precisely the one that was significantly loaded against him. When the Institute of Archaeology, which had provided him with his academic base since his arrival from Italy almost a decade previously, launched a new lectureship in Palestinian Archaeology in the summer of 1947,¹⁹² he was competing with none other than

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., fol. 498, Ilse Ursell to David Diringier, 27 September 1947.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., fols. 501 and 509, Ilse Ursell to David Diringier, 31 October 1947 and 25 November 1947.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., fols. 440, 470 and 495, David Diringier to Ilse Ursell, 3 May 1947, 12 July 1947 and 21 September 1947, enclosing Sir Ellis Minns’ foreword to his book. Sir Frederic Kenyon and the SPSL were more cautious in their expectations: fol. 475, Ilse Ursell to David Diringier, 15 July 1947 and fol. 480, Sir Frederic Kenyon to Ilse Ursell, 23 July 1947. There was however encouragement from the publishers Hutchinson who expressed interest in commissioning a further volume on the history of the book (fol. 482, David Diringier to Ilse Ursell, 17 July 1947), which was published as *The Hand-Produced Book* in 1953.

¹⁹¹ David Diringier to Ilse Ursell, 4 June 1947, 14 June 1947 and 21 September 1947, “Diringier, David,” MS, SPSL, 251/2, BL, Oxford, fols. 455, 464 and 495, on his application for the chair in Oriental Studies at the University of Sydney, Australia; fols. 507, 512 and 521, David Diringier to Ilse Ursell, 19 November 1947, 25 November 1947 and 22 January 1948 and fol. 530, Fernando Berckemeyer (Peruvian Ambassador in London) to David Diringier, 4 February 1948, on possible openings in Argentina and Peru; fols. 415, 470, 495 and 512, David Diringier to Ilse Ursell, 5 December 1946, 12 July 1947, 21 September 1947 and 25 November 1947 on possibilities in the US at the UN, and fol. 474, Ilse Ursell to David Diringier, 15 July 1947 on part-time work for the Jewish Encyclopedia in New York.

¹⁹² Ibid., fol. 461, David Diringier to Ilse Ursell, 10 June 1947.

Kathleen Kenyon, the secretary of the Institute and Sir Frederic's daughter. The decision to award the position to Kathleen Kenyon— "Diringer has been unlucky again"¹⁹³—in November 1947¹⁹⁴ cannot have been a surprise, nor indeed the decision of the SPSL finally to terminate his grant from the end of the year.

Diringer was now on his own and his immediate conclusion was that there was no point in remaining in Britain. "I do not think I shall stay here much longer,"¹⁹⁵ he informed the SPSL at the end of November 1947. He had already considered the possibility of a return to Italy the previous spring, if he could find no way of succeeding in Britain or the US,¹⁹⁶ and he now decided to make a personal trip there to assess his chances.¹⁹⁷ This despite having been warned by various friends in Italy, some months previously, that "for the present it is not advisable for me to return there with my family." The circumstances did not exist for creating new positions; life was extremely expensive; and the "black market" was active.¹⁹⁸ How right his friends were. Diringer's report to the SPSL, on his return in January 1948, painted a decidedly negative picture. He had seen "hundreds of people," discussed the possibility of reclaiming his previous position—or another one—at the University of Florence. Potential openings in Rome, where he had given some lectures, had been considered. He had even applied for a position in Trieste. But the general situation in Italy was very difficult. Florence University was running a deficit of over one hundred million lire, and it was no wonder that "they don't want to create new posts, especially in a specialized field like that of mine." He had however been promised that his situation would be re-examined, and that should there ever be a very slight possibility, "a position will be created for [me]." But clearly nothing would happen in the immediate future. Diringer admitted that had he been alone he would have remained in Italy, "but I cannot give up my home here and take my family to Italy without having obtained there, at least, a minimum." As it was, he was back in Britain, and, having used up his available

¹⁹³ Ibid., fol. 504, Ilse Ursell to Winton Thomas, 8 November 1947.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., fol. 507, David Diringer to Ilse Ursell, 19 November 1947.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., fol. 512, David Diringer to Ilse Ursell, 25 November 1947.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., fol. 435, David Diringer to Ilse Ursell, 9 April 1947.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., fol. 512, David Diringer to Ilse Ursell, 25 November 1947.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., fol. 495, David Diringer to Ilse Ursell, 21 September 1947 (underlining in original).

resources—and, indeed, overdrawn his bank account by £15—on this abortive trip, found himself once more at the mercy of the SPSL.¹⁹⁹

“This is my situation. I have been expelled from Italy; I cannot find anything suitable here; I don’t know where to go. And still I have not committed any crime, have worked hard all my life, and do not deserve anything but to get an opportunity to earn my living and to maintain my family.”²⁰⁰ Diringer’s position was indeed critical: “[...] presently I am in such a situation—without any fault of mine—that I am even unable to make any plans.” He asked the SPSL for a grant, at least in the form of a loan until the summer of 1948.²⁰¹ In the event, the Society reluctantly awarded an emergency grant for February and again for March, urging him meanwhile to prioritize contact with the Appointments Department of the Ministry of Labour,²⁰² and at the same time trying to secure at least part-time research work for him.²⁰³ Early that March, the further renewal of his grant was again discussed by the Executive Committee of the Society on the submission of the Allocation Committee whose members argued that scholars in his age-group who had not been re-established in academic work and who had no immediate prospects of so being should try to earn their living by doing other work. They reiterated their fear that he might turn out to be a “pension case.” The Society simply did not have the funds “to keep such a scholar going for more than ten years.”²⁰⁴ Against this, Diringer’s protector, Sir Frederic, Vice-president of the Society and present at the meeting of the Executive Committee, spoke forcibly—as he had done previously—to the case for continuing to help him “as long as we can.” He had never tried to take advantage of the SPSL, had tried hard to get work, and had always given up drawing on the Society’s financial assistance whenever he succeeded.²⁰⁵ It was—again as so many times in the past years—Sir Frederic’s view

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., fol. 521, David Diringer to Ilse Ursell, 22 January 1948.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Ibid., fol. 524, David Diringer to Ilse Ursell, 27 January 1948.

²⁰² Ibid., fols. 525, 532 and 538, Ilse Ursell to David Diringer, 29 January 1948, 6 February 1948 and 26 February 1948.

²⁰³ Ibid., fol. 531, Ilse Ursell to Charles Singer, 6 February 1948; fol. 533, Charles Singer to Ilse Ursell, 9 February 1948. At the same time, Diringer’s name had also been put forward for a lectureship at University College, London with a decision expected the following May (fol. 528, David Diringer to Ilse Ursell, 4 February 1948).

²⁰⁴ Ibid., fol. 540, Ilse Ursell to Sir Frederic Kenyon, 1 March 1948.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., fol. 539, Sir Frederic Kenyon to Ilse Ursell, 29 February 1948.

that prevailed now to secure the continuance of Diringer's funding. The grant however would henceforth be renewed month to month, with no indefinite extension, as if to underline the precariousness of his position. It was true that by now his *magnum opus* on the history of the alphabet with its "appreciative foreword" by Sir Ellis Minns had finally come out,²⁰⁶ but once again the important element behind Sir Frederic's success in persuading the Society to continue its payments (and behind his regret when Diringer's grant had been suspended back in the January) was that there were still avenues of hope for potential employment that remained open in both the US and Britain.²⁰⁷

Meanwhile, in the US, Diringer's luck began to improve once family members already there began to activate themselves on his behalf. His younger sister, Henryka (Henia, Henrietta), who, like him, had studied in Italy and then come to Britain where she had married, had moved to the US in the autumn of 1947. An older sister was already there. Henryka, now based in New York, was in an excellent position to do what she could to help her brother, committing herself to move "heaven and earth to get [me] there."²⁰⁸ She had been to see Arnold Kunst, the Polish Indologist who had promised to arrange something for Diringer at the UN; and more importantly, she had contacted "a kind of cousin," George J. Mintzer, an arbitration lawyer in New York who acted as counsel for the American Jewish Committee.²⁰⁹ Diringer had always lamented the lack of a "personal friend who would do all in order to help me," doubting with regard to the US that he would obtain a position "if there isn't anybody to say [...] 'We must have this man'," ²¹⁰ but in George Mintzer he found a well-placed advocate who was willing to take action on his relative's behalf. Mintzer, like the SPSL before him, turned initially to Jewish institutions of learning, before the end of 1947 contacting the HUC, Dropsie College, as well as the Jewish Theological Seminary, but for all three institutions, however aware they were of Diringer's "high scholarly reputation and the extraordinary quality of his scholarly work," the stumbling

²⁰⁶ Reviews of *The Alphabet* in *The Manchester Guardian*, April 20, 1948 and *The Observer* April 25, 1948.

²⁰⁷ Sir Frederic Kenyon to Ilse Ursell, 1 December 1947 and 29 February 1948, "Diringer, David," MS, SPSL, 251/2, BL, Oxford, fols. 516 and 539.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., fol. 500, David Diringer to Ilse Ursell, 25 October 1947.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., fol. 502, David Diringer to Ilse Ursell, 4 November 1947. See note 189.

²¹⁰ Ibid., fol. 440, David Diringer to Ilse Ursell, 3 May 1947 (underlining in original).

block was money.²¹¹ Mintzer had better news by February 1948 when it emerged there was a chance that Princeton would “avail themselves of Diringer’s services” for the academic year 1948-1949. Mintzer was in London that month and used the opportunity this offered for direct contact not only with Diringer, but also with the SPSL, to promote his cousin’s position, asking the Society if funding could be offered at least until Princeton’s decision in the forthcoming autumn.²¹² And this argument was taken up—successfully—by Sir Frederic at the Executive Committee meeting in March.²¹³

At the same time, the SPSL had not abandoned its own quest for a solution to Diringer’s dilemma. In late January 1948, the Society contacted on his behalf the American Committee for Emigré Scholars, Writers and Artists which had been established in 1945 when the EC was wound down, leaving many scholars still in need of assistance,²¹⁴ and was also in touch with the American Association of University Professors on his behalf.²¹⁵ The initial response from the secretary of the Committee for Emigré Scholars had been negative: “I have no suggestion beyond what you have done and, concluding from similar cases, I do not think that he would have a chance in this country.”²¹⁶ But two months later, the Committee informed the SPSL of a possible opening for him in Canada, apparently following on from a further initiative of George Mintzer, who had been in contact with Saul Hayes, a fellow lawyer and Executive Director of the Canadian Jewish Congress, about his cousin’s prospects. The Lady Davis

²¹¹ Ibid., fol. 520, George Mintzer to David Diringer, 22 December 1947 (copy); Diringer’s family had also been in touch with Samuel Belkin, President of Yeshiva University (fol. 512, David Diringer to Ilse Ursell, 25 November 1947).

²¹² Ibid., fol. 535, George Mintzer to Ilse Ursell, 16 February 1948; fol. 326, Agenda Item No. 6, undated, but February 1948.

²¹³ Ibid., fol. 539, Sir Frederic Kenyon to Ilse Ursell, 29 February 1948.

²¹⁴ Ibid., fol. 518, Ilse Ursell to Else Staudinger, Executive Secretary, American Committee for Émigré Scholars, Writers and Artists (later called the American Council for Émigrés in the Professions (ACEP), 26 January 1948. On the Committee, see Gerhard Sonnert and Gerald Holton, *What happened to the children who fled Nazi persecution* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) 211.

²¹⁵ Ilse Ursell to Lena F. Dahme, Chairman of the Hunter College Chapter, American Association of University Professors, 4 February 1948, “Diringer, David,” MS, SPSL, 251/2, BL, Oxford, fol. 526.

²¹⁶ Ibid., fol. 542, information sheet, 3 March 1948, extract of letter from Else Staudinger, 10 February 1948.

Foundation—a fund set up by the Canadian Jewish philanthropist Henriette Marie Meyer (Lady Davis)—was planning to invite twenty five refugee scholars to Canada, with potential provision for a position in Diringer’s field.²¹⁷ He duly sent off the forms in early May,²¹⁸ but, before any decision was made, he found himself experiencing a timely reversal of fortune much closer to home.

Resolution at Last

In addition to the US, the other avenue of opportunity for Diringer continued to be Britain, which had been his place of residence now for nearly a decade. Over this period, David Winton Thomas at Cambridge had aligned himself with Sir Frederic Kenyon, and indeed Sir Ellis Minns, as a supporter of Diringer. “I need hardly say again that, should opportunity occur, I shall be glad to do anything I can on Dr. Diringer’s behalf,”²¹⁹ and he was true to his word. His opportunity finally came in the wake of the publication of the 1947 Scarborough Report on Oriental, Eastern European, Slavonic and African studies in Britain, which sought to boost academic provision in these subjects in order to better meet the country’s needs in the post-war world.²²⁰ The resulting injection of funds made possible the creation of new positions and, in November 1947, Winton Thomas hinted at the possibility that an opening for Diringer might be forthcoming in this context. SOAS in London seems to have been initially considered,²²¹ but in the end it was Winton Thomas’ own university at Cambridge that appointed Diringer to a newly created Lectureship in Semitic epigraphy from the academic year 1948-49. There, at the Faculty of Oriental Languages, he joined his former university companion from Florence, Jacob Teicher, in a position that had effectively been

²¹⁷ Ibid., fol. 550, Saul Hayes to George Mintzer, 12 April 1948; fol. 546, Else Staudinger to Ilse Ursell, 14 April 1948.

²¹⁸ David Diringer to Ilse Ursell, 4 May 1948, “Diringer, David,” MS, SPSL, 251/2, BL, Oxford, fol. 559.

²¹⁹ Ibid., fol. 437, David Winton Thomas to Ilse Ursell, 10 April 1947.

²²⁰ *Report of the Interdepartmental Commission of Enquiry on Oriental, Slavonic, East European and African Studies* (Scarborough Report) (London: His Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1947).

²²¹ Ilse Ursell to Sir Frederic Kenyon, 26 November 1947, “Diringer, David,” MS, SPSL, 251/2, BL, Oxford, fol. 511.

tailored for him.²²² Finally he had achieved his longed-for ambition: an academic position in his own chosen field. It came after a wait of nearly a decade, during which he had suffered enormous uncertainty and difficult living conditions. At the end of May 1948, he informed the SPSL of his good news.²²³ The Allocation Committee duly expressed its delight.²²⁴ A few days later, he was granted British nationality.²²⁵ The SPSL awarded him a continuation of his grant until the beginning of the academic year, and a further three months as a loan since his first salary payment would be made in arrears.²²⁶ He repaid the last installment of the loan at the end of 1956 with a wish he could “do something to repay my debt of gratitude apart from my debt of money,” so bringing to an end his formal connection with the SPSL.²²⁷

Epilogue

Apart from witnessing Diringer’s establishment as a scholar in Britain, the 1950s also saw a symbolic revival of his academic career in Italy. Towards the end of 1954, just over eight years since the Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione confirmed that his reinstatement as *libero docente* had already been communicated to Florence University, the Ministry contacted the rector requesting an urgent review of his position.²²⁸ The background to this new approach may have been the introduction of the reparations legislation in the Italian parliament back in January 1952 by the Communist senator and former anti-Fascist activist, Umberto

²²² *Cambridge University Reporter* 78 (1947-1948), August 4, 1948, 1554. On Teicher’s appointment, see Teicher, “Jacob Leib Teicher between Florence and Cambridge,” 338-339.

²²³ David Diringer to Ilse Ursell, 26 May 1948, “Diringer, David,” MS, SPSL, 251/2, BL, Oxford, fol. 561.

²²⁴ Ibid., fol. 563, Ilse Ursell to David Diringer, 31 May 1948.

²²⁵ Naturalisation Certificate, 7 June 1948.

²²⁶ Ilse Ursell to David Diringer, 21 June 1948, “Diringer, David,” MS, SPSL, 251/2, BL, Oxford, fol. 566.

²²⁷ Ibid., fol. 590, David Diringer to Esther Simpson, 4 December 1956.

²²⁸ See section above “Italy: 1945-1946. A Frustrated Return”; Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione to the Rettore, Università di Firenze, 1 October 1954, “Fascicolo carriera libero docente di David Diringer,” Sezione docenti, ASUFi, Florence (copy in “Diringer, David,” MPI, DGIS, Liberi Docenti, 3a serie (1930-1950), b. 186, ACS, Rome).

Terracini, and confirmed in March 1955.²²⁹ The original award of the *libera docenza* back in 1934 had required confirmation after five years and this was now fourteen years out of date. Nor, the Ministry observed, was it the case that any extension had been requested. At no point however was it mentioned that, by the date required for his initial confirmation in 1939, Diringer had already been dismissed by the provisions of the racial legislation. Following the ministerial behest, the University of Florence requested an updated overview of his position from him, which of course included details of his Cambridge appointment, and at a meeting of the Council of the Facoltà di Lettere at the end of January 1955, he was duly confirmed as *libero docente*. The report paid tribute to “the productive and important academic work” that characterized his scholarly contribution, noting that he had been forced since 1938 to undertake his work outside Italy, “owing to the Fascist anti-Jewish legislation.”²³⁰ The Ministry made a similar acknowledgment and issued its formal ratification by ministerial decree on 26 March 1955.²³¹ Although the Ministry was at pains to point out that he was obliged to teach at least one *corso libero* every five years,²³² it has not been possible to quantify the extent of his professional presence in Florence in the wake of his formal reinstatement. Diringer certainly had every reason to maintain regular contact with the city to which his wife and daughter had returned on a permanent basis without him, but, as he argued to university authorities in early 1964, he had a full time position in Cambridge and, unless invited to give a course of lectures or official seminars, could only come to Florence during the summer vacation.²³³

²²⁹ On reparations legislation and Terracini, see Elisabetta Corradini, *Il difficile reinserimento degli ebrei. Itinerario e applicazione della legge Terracini n. 96 del 10 marzo 1955* (Turin: Zamorani, 2012).

²³⁰ Rettore, Università di Firenze to Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione (including extract from the minutes of a meeting of the Consiglio di Facoltà, Facoltà di Lettere, Università di Firenze, 31 January 1955, “Conferma Libera Docenza Prof. David Diringer”: “[...] l’intensa ed importante attività scientifica [...]”; “[...] per effetto delle leggi fasciste antiggiudaiche [...]”), 9 March 1955, “Fascicolo carriera libero docente di David Diringer,” Sezione docenti, ASUFi, Florence (copy in “Diringer, David,” MPI, DGIS, Liberi Docenti, 3a serie (1930-1950), b. 186, ACS, Rome).

²³¹ Ibid., Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione to the Rettore, Università di Firenze, 26 March 1955.

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Ibid., David Diringer to the Capo uffici affari legali e del personale (University of Florence), 24 February 1964.

What is clear however is that Diringer continued to be listed among the *liberi docenti* of the university into the 1970s.²³⁴

As a foreign Jew arriving in Italy as a young student, Diringer had managed to establish himself, however precariously, on the first rungs of the Italian academic ladder. This happened thanks to the support he received from Italian academics and crucially to his felicitous timing in obtaining the requisite Italian citizenship prior to the effective exclusion of Jews from the naturalization process as the 1930s progressed.

In the tragedy of 1938, the loss of his position and his expulsion from Italy forced him to confront the challenge of seeking alternative employment abroad, but unlike those Jewish academics from Italy who managed to reach the US, Diringer failed—before the outbreak of war, as the war progressed, and after the end of the war—to reach the country that for him too was his declared option of choice.²³⁵ As one of the smaller number of Jewish refugees from Italy who had found their way to Britain, he was forced back into having to contend with the fewer opportunities available there.

Frustrated at the end of the war in his attempts to return to Italy, an experience that mirrored that of so many, particularly the younger generation of Italian Jewish academics who had lost their positions in 1938, and unsuccessful in his attempts to move elsewhere, Diringer was left dependent on the sometimes reluctant patronage he had been able to attract in Britain. Over the years, he successfully reinvented himself so that fears about his former Fascist associations were put aside, to be replaced by the sympathy and concern of supporters who struggled to find a suitable position for a scholar whose subject of specialization was too narrow for the requirements of British academia. That, in the end, what the SPSL labeled as “[...] probably our most difficult case”²³⁶ was brought to a successful conclusion was due ultimately to their perseverance and his own determination not to abandon hope.

²³⁴ Università degli Studi di Firenze, *Annuario per l'anno accademico 1969-70/1970-71* (Florence: Il cenacolo Arti Grafiche, 1973), 386, *Albo Liberi Docenti*.

²³⁵ Diringer's experience was far from unique for Italian academics who reached Britain. See, for example, Capristo, “Arnaldo Momigliano.”

²³⁶ Ilse Ursell to Else Staudinger, 26 January 1948, “Diringer, David,” MS, SPSL, 251/2, BL, Oxford, fol. 518.

Diringer would spend the rest of his professional career in Cambridge, remaining in post until his retirement in 1967, having been promoted to Reader in Semitic Epigraphy in his final year of office.²³⁷ He was the one and only holder of the position. In 1959, he had founded an Alphabet Museum (housed in the garden of his Cambridge home), the contents of which he took with him to Israel when he moved there in 1968. They currently form part of the Eretz Israel Museum in Tel Aviv. Following his death while in Cambridge, on 13 February 1975, his body was sent for burial to Israel, the land of his youthful Zionist dream.²³⁸

Acknowledgments

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²³⁷ Cambridge University Officers, Academic Officers, University Lecturers, Semitic Epigraphy, <https://venn.lib.cam.ac.uk/Documents/acad/2016/lists/index.html>, accessed 9 July 2024.

²³⁸ Munio Wurman, "Prof. David Diringer," in *Memorial Book of Tlumacz*, eds. Blond et al, LXXI.

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