

Luca Fenoglio, *Angelo Donati e la "Questione Ebraica" nella Francia Occupata dall'Esercito Italiano* (Turin: Silvio Zamorani Editore, 2013), pp. 188

by *Davide Rodogno*

This compact, dense and well-written book is worth reading. First, a young and talented historian, Luca Fenoglio, who is completing in PhD in Edinburgh, wrote it while his thesis manuscript is not yet achieved. He should be praised for such an accomplishment. Readers interested in the history of Italian anti-Semitism, of Italian military occupations during the Second World War and Fascist policies towards the Jews, will appreciate the study because of its clarity and the originality and soundness of the argument. Second, the book offers a balanced account and brings to the fore many documents researched in several archives. Third, Fenoglio puts forward his own interpretation of Fascist policies towards the Jews, connecting the figure, role, thought and actions of Angelo Donati to the events. Fenoglio places Donati in the midst of the events carefully. He wisely contextualizes the work of Donati to save the Jews in Southern France, avoiding a hagiographical account of the deeds of a hero. Fenoglio also offers his interpretation of where, how, and why previous generations of historians – including the author of this review – overlooked, misread or misinterpreted sources they consulted. History books should not be written to last forever; they do not contain incontrovertible truths; new research is supposed to complete, strengthen or revise statements and arguments put forward by previous cohorts of scholars. This is the purpose of Fenoglio's book.

Fabio Levi's preface explains Luca Fenoglio's purpose in detail. A short introduction sets the tone of the book, which opens with the longest chapter dealing with the "historiographical question" (as Fenoglio puts it). Here the historian reviews, categorizes and distinguishes the work of various generations of historians who have dealt with this question before him. Fenoglio is clear and goes straight to the point. His work helps the non-specialist to situate the historiography and sheds light on his intentions. The research questions underpinning the rest of the volume are listed at page 45-46. Here I will summarize some of them: Which were the consequences of the collaboration between the Jewish banker Angelo Donati and the Italian consul Calisse to hamper the decision of French authorities to expel foreign Jews from the *Alpes Maritimes*, in December 1942? How did Donati and foreign and local Jews interpret the Italian authorities' decision opposing the abovementioned decision to expel the Jews? What were the circumstances that led Donati to collaborate with Italian authorities and why did the latter pursued such collaboration? How did Donati manage to mobilize diplomatic representatives of four countries to transfer thousands of Jews in North Africa? Why historians have overlooked Donati's role?

Chapter 2, 3, and 4 are devoted to a political biography of Donati, his professional and social ascendancy in Paris; the shocking experience of the 1942 *Vél d'Hiv* rounding up, and Donati's activities on behalf of the Jews living in the Italian zones of occupation in Southern France. Chapter 5 and 6 offer a detailed account of Donati relations with Italian authorities and of what exactly he did to save the Jews. Chapter 7 to 10 cover the period going from the fall of Mussolini of July 1943 to the Armistice of 8 September 1943 and are followed by Fenoglio's conclusion and epilogue.

There is no doubt whatever that the activities of Donati contributed to postponing the deportation of thousands of foreign Jews who had sought refuge in Southern France. Fenoglio's narrative is persuasive as to Donati's rescue attempts during the summer of 1943, though this is not the most original part of his monograph.

This reviewer entirely agrees with Fenoglio's statement (page 162) that Angelo Donati's action in *Côte d'Azur* from 11 November 1942 to 8 September 1943 (i.e. the ten months of the military occupation of this area by Fascist Italy) did not determine Italian policies towards the Jews; and, that Italian authorities' decision not to collaborate with the deportation of Jews of the areas under occupation by Italian IV Army opened up the space inside which Donati could operate on their behalf. I also think the interpretation of Donati as *gevir* (i.e. the rich Jewish *notable* that in *ancien regime* Europe defended and protected his coreligionists) is appropriate and fruitful. I regret Fenoglio did not make the most of this analogy, which might have helped the reader situating Donati's involvement. Had the *gevir* analogy been put forward earlier in the monograph readers might have grasped the author's point of view better Donati. The *gevir* analogy is particularly appropriate to explain that Donati was more than a mere go-between or intermediary between Jews and Italian authorities. This reviewer also concurs with Fenoglio (p. 165) that the policies of occupation were far beyond Donati's influence as well as beyond local Jewish organizations; these policies followed multiple – heterogeneous – logics that were not systematically related to the "Jewish Question". I also share Fenoglio's view that the action of the "Jewish banker", as he often refers to Donati, had an impact on the modalities of the internments in various *résidences forcées*, showing that Donati's action were certainly not irrelevant.

Finally, at page 166, Fenoglio claims that the words of Donati on the absence of anti-Semitism and the humanity of Italian officers contradict the argument of my research, which claims the opposite. Here, I would like to say that I maintain my point of view. Yes, I do happily and comfortably sit with historians like Michele Sarfatti and others; this is the category of scholars that, according to Fenoglio, I belong to. Even if I disagree with Fenoglio I care about stating that the point Fenoglio makes is valuable, sound and put forward meticulously. His argument is developed from Donati's perspective; and obviously – and for good reasons – Donati saw a substantial difference between Italian and German authorities or between the former and French local authorities. The

purpose of my study was to examine the politics and policies of Italian authorities in all European territories occupied by Fascist Italy. Therefore the starting point of our research and our perspectives are different, though not necessarily incompatible. If in my research the activities of Donati were overlooked or got lost in translation, it was because my focus was on the interlocutors of the *gevir* rather than on the *gevir*.

The exercise of zooming-in and zooming-out is an art that few historians master, one among them is Saul Friedländer. I wish Fenoglio to be able to zoom out and move beyond the individual – certainly meaningful and significant – case of Angelo Donati to investigate the complex, contradictory and ambiguous history of Italian politics towards foreign Jews in the annexed and militarily occupied territories during the Second World War.

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