

FRANCESCO PORRO: FASCISM AND ASTRONOMY

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Abstract

In 1882 Francesco Porro (1861-1937) took a degree in physics from the University of Pavia, where he was a student of Felice Casorati (1835-1890), professor of calculus, and Eugenio Beltrami (1835-1900), professor of mathematical physics.

Even as a student, he supported nationalist ideas arising in Italy from the Risorgimento. He became explicitly an irredentist in 1882, because of the incarceration and the subsequent execution of Guglielmo Oberdan by the Austro-Hungarian Empire, in Trieste.

He had a good preparation in physics, but his mathematical basis and the admission, in 1883, among the staff of the Astronomical Observatory of Brera, directed by Giovanni Schiaparelli (1835-1910), encouraged him to take up classical astronomy and geodesy.

This work starts from what it was already published in 1997, deepening Porro's studies and career and trying to answer some questions.

1. Did his political ideas influence his scientific choices?
2. Was his academic career facilitated by his precocious fascist faith?
3. Did his researches profit by those beliefs?

We know that in 1931 only 1% of university professors did not swear allegiance to the fascist regime. Among those few there was only one professor in mathematics, physics or astronomy: Vito Volterra (1860-1940). So we can put another question, more general than the preceding ones.

4. Which astronomers might be really considered fascists in the following years?

Balestrieri R., "Francesco Porro e l'Osservatorio meteorologico e astronomico dell'Università di Genova", in *8th Annual Meeting on the History of Astronomy. Astronomical Observatories and Institutions in Italy - II. Napoli, 29-30 March 1996*, edited by E. Proverbio, *Memorie S.A.It.*, **68** (1997), n. 3, pp. 597-616 <http://adsabs.harvard.edu/abs/1997MmSAI..68..597B> .

A section of the *Urania Ligustica* hypertext is devoted to Francesco Porro:
<http://uranieligustica.altervista.org/porro/index.htm> .

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