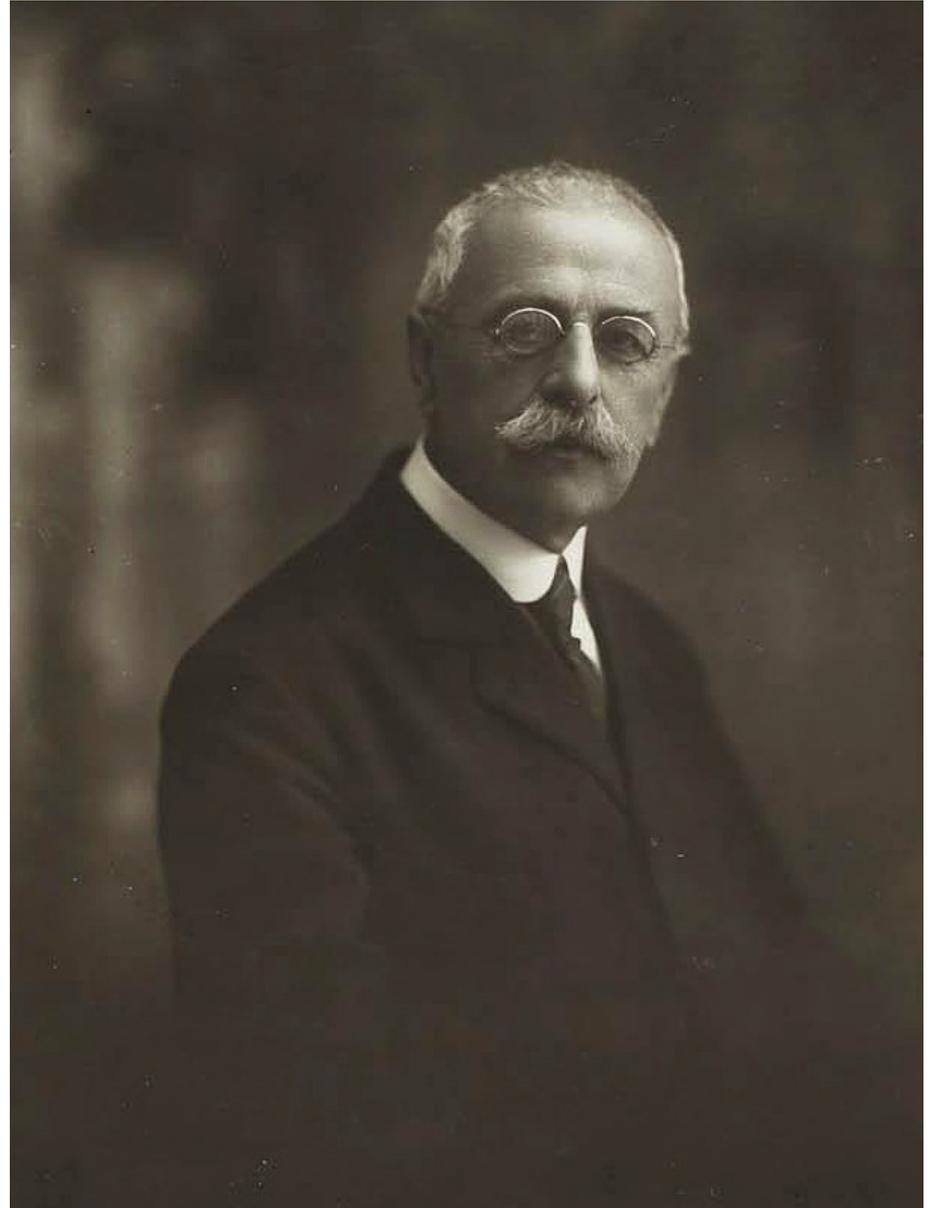


Astronomy and astronautics  
under dictatorial regimes  
(Valencia, 24–25 September 2015)

**Francesco Porro:  
an astronomer  
from nationalism  
to fascism**

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Museo Galileo (Florence)

# Owing to the nature of this event...

... I mean the *workshop*...

... you will be not surprised that this is a *work in progress*!

But I share my “laboratory notebooks” on the web.

The documents I use, namely

- primary sources (Porro's manuscripts and letters' references, list of his printed works) and
- secondary sources (list and excerpts from pertinent papers and monographs, links to websites)

are organized and available, with original remarks,

in the hypertext [\*URANIA LIGUSTICA\*](#).

# From the homepage...

<http://uraniaaligustica.altervista.org/>

 *Intersezioni tra la Liguria e il Cielo*

Presentazione – Metodologia

 *Intersections between Liguria and Sky*

Forward – Methodology

 *Intersections entre la Ligurie et le ciel*

Présentation – Méthodologie

[INDICE GENERALE](#)

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## URANIA LIGUSTICA



[academia.edu](http://academia.edu)



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# ... to the general index...

<http://uranialigustica.altervista.org/index-indice.htm>

| INDICE GENERALE   |   | APPARATI   |
|---|---|--|
| <b>Il volto di Urania</b><br>Galleria iconografica                        | <b>Delizie in villa</b><br>Salvago e il suo ambiente                      | <b>Matematica sublime</b><br>Dalla meccanica celeste al metro        |
| <b>La Liguria dal cielo</b><br>Immagini commentate                        | <b>Il tramonto dell'astrologia</b><br>Una lotta senza esclusione di colpi | <b>Fisica sperimentale</b><br>Meteorologia e astronomia              |
| <b>Le origini dei Liguri</b><br>Miti, lacerti e tradizioni                | <b>Arcadia scientifica</b><br>L'esempio di Ricchieri e Lomellini          | <b>Cielo e marina. II</b><br>L'Istituto Idrografico di Marina        |
| <b>L'orientamento degli edifici</b><br>Impianti urbani e chiese romaniche | <b>La misura del tempo</b><br>Dalle meridiane all'ora francese            | <b>Astronomia e astrofisica</b><br>Da <b>Porro</b> a <b>Masani</b>   |
| <b>Astrologia e arte</b><br>In epoca medievale                            | <b>I lumi nel cielo</b><br>Una nuova visione del mondo                    | <b>Industria e aeronautica</b><br>Dalla <b>San Giorgio</b> a Malerba |
| <b>Sul mare e oltre</b><br>I fratelli Vivaldi, Colombo e il '500          | <b>Visitatori fugaci</b><br><b>Boscovich</b> , Lalande, Piazzesi e C.     | <b>Astrofili nel Novecento. I</b><br>Persone ed eventi               |
| <b>La nuova scienza</b><br>Pro o contro Galilei?                          | <b>Al seguito della duchessa</b><br>Zach e la <b>Corrèspondance</b>       | <b>Astrofili nel Novecento. II</b><br>Associazioni e osservatori     |
| <b>Astronomi del Re</b><br>Cassini, i Maraldi e Halley                    | <b>Cielo e marina. I</b><br>Una specola navale dell'Ottocento             | <b>Il cielo dalla Liguria</b><br>L'inquinamento luminoso             |

## URANIA LIGUSTICA



# ... to the section of Francesco Porro

<http://uranialigustica.altervista.org/porro/index.htm>

**FRANCESCO PORRO**  
(1861-1937)

[Premessa](#)

Sintesi originali

Ad usum Delphini

[Vita](#)

[Manoscritti](#)

[Epistolario](#)

[Opere edite](#)

[Fonti secondarie](#)

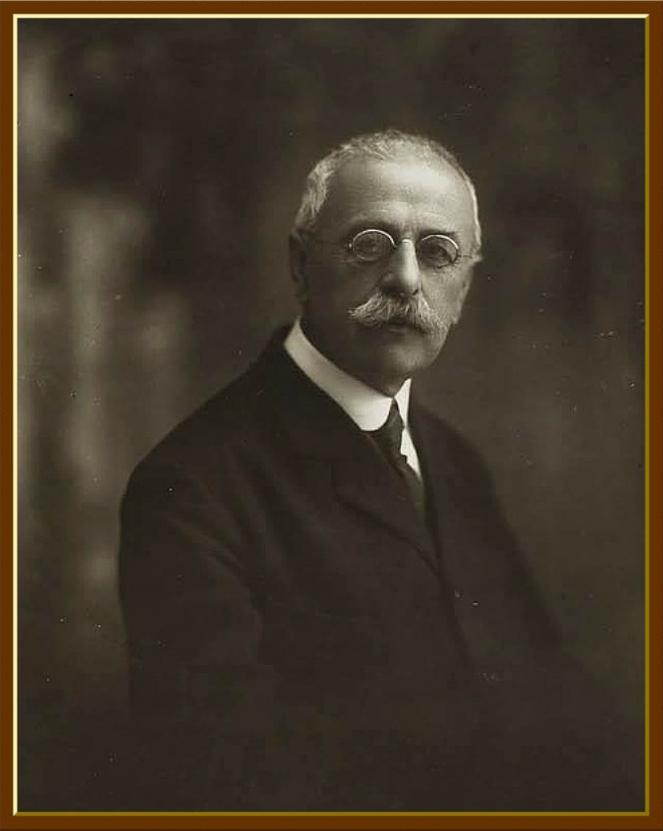
[Fonti terziarie](#)

[Ricerche attuali](#)

☺ ☰

**APPARATI**

🏠



Fotografia (anni Venti?)  
Da [Museo Galileo](#)

The image shows a website page for Francesco Porro. On the left is a navigation menu with various links. The main content area features a portrait of Francesco Porro, an elderly man with a mustache and glasses, wearing a dark suit. The portrait is set against a background of repeating purple and green damask patterns. Below the portrait is a caption box with the text 'Fotografia (anni Venti?)' and a link to 'Museo Galileo'.

# Most interesting chapters are...

*... the printed works' catalogue.*

A list of 190 papers and monographs.

But a source (1936 – Porro died on 1937) acquaints with 300 works!

Several writings does not concern original researches: he was a science popularizer and wrote many political articles too.



# Most interesting chapters are...

*... the secondary sources' list.*

A list of 106 papers and monographs.

For several ones, excerpts are yet available in:

- the list itself,
- specific files.

There are original remarks in some files.



# Most interesting chapters are...

*... topical researches' list.*

The most important astronomical work by Porro is the third reduction of the stellar catalogue of Giuseppe Piazzi (1746-1826).

It is unfinished.

Porro published right ascension tables, but Herman S. Davis (1868-1933) did not publish declination ones!

Here there is a list of 16 papers on this theme.



# Why is important Porro in Valencia?

His way from nationalism to fascism is exemplar.

- When he was 21 years old, he spoke at state funeral of Giuseppe Garibaldi (Caprera Isle, 1882) for University of Pavia's students.
- He asked to Victor Hugo his intercession with the Emperor Franz Joseph I for the life of Guglielmo Oberdan (Pavia, 1882).
- He was a leader of the political societies *Trento e Trieste* (1902), *Associazione Nazionalista Italiana* (1910?), *Patto Nuovo* (1918), and other ones.

# Why is important Porro in Valencia?

- He founded the *Fasci di combattimento* in Genoa two day after their foundation by Mussolini in Milan (1919).
- He sustained the irredentist enterprise by D'Annunzio (Fiume, 1919).
- He participated to the mobilitation for the *Marcia su Roma* (1922).
- He signed the *Manifesto degli intellettuali fascisti* (Bologna-Rome, 1925).
- He founded the *Istituto ligure fascista di cultura*, few months after the foundation of the national institute by Gentile (Rome, 1925).

# But... beware!

## POLITICS

- He was a colonialist, *but* with a real interest for geography and exploration.
- He was anti-bolshevik, *but* anti-german too.
- He thought that there were differences between races (in the sense of Lombroso), *but* he had several ebraic friends (e.g. Lombroso himself, Volterra).

## SCIENCE

- He was an astronomer, *but* he knew the advances in astrophysics and, far better, the history of astronomy.

# Some events of his life and career

- 1861: birth in Cremona.
- 1882: physics degree, University of Pavia.
- 1883: apprentice astronomer, Observatory of Milan.
- 1886: assistant astronomer, Observatory of Turin.
- 1887: lecturer of Astronomy, University of Turin.
- 1896: director of the Observatory of Turin.
- 1901: full professor of Astronomy, University of Genoa.
- 1906: director of the Observatory of La Plata (Argentina).
- 1911: full professor of Astronomy, University of Genoa.
- 1937: death in Genoa.

# Much more events in...

FRANCESCO  
PORRO  
(1861-1937)

[Premessa](#) **BIOGRAPHICAL  
EVENT**

[Sintesi originali](#)

[Ad usum Delphini](#)

[Vita](#)

[Manoscritti](#)

[Epistolario](#)

[Opere edite](#)

[Fonti secondarie](#)

[Fonti terziarie](#)

[Ricerche attuali](#)



APPARATI



1919

**Il 23 marzo Mussolini fonda a Milano i Fasci italiani di combattimento.**<sup>1</sup>

Due giorni dopo Porro partecipa alla riunione costitutiva del Fascio di combattimento genovese, "a nome del figlio, valoroso ufficiale caduto in guerra".<sup>2</sup>

Si noti che Porro aderisce al movimento fascista ben prima che l'Associazione nazionalista italiana confluisca nel Partito nazionale fascista (1923).

**REMARK**

**HISTORICAL  
EVENT**

**Il 15 aprile, a Milano, un gruppo di nazionalisti devasta la sede del quotidiano socialista *Avanti!*: è l'inizio dello squadristo.**<sup>3</sup>

Porro dirige la neonata associazione *La giovane Fiume*, tesa a sostenerne l'annessione all'Italia. Il 15 settembre il prefetto di Genova la scioglie a causa dei suoi intenti "delittuosi e pericolosi".<sup>4</sup>

Contribuisce a raccogliere volontari per la Legione Fiumana, riunita in primavera dal cap. Giovanni Host-Venturi (1892-1980) per annettere Fiume *manu militari*.<sup>5</sup>

Gestisce il comitato che ospita a Genova, per oltre un anno, centocinquanta bambini di Fiume inviati da D'Annunzio: alloggiano in un palazzo di villa in Albaro e sono mantenuti grazie a sottoscrizioni indette dal quotidiano genovese *Corriere mercantile*.

Per il suo sostegno all'impresa di Ronchi, D'Annunzio lo decorerà "della medaglia dei legionari e della stella d'oro".<sup>6</sup>

Più delle medaglie dannunziane impressiona il riconoscimento di Host-Venturi, che equipara il ruolo di Porro a quello di pochi altri sostenitori, tra cui lo stesso Mussolini.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Fasci italiani di combattimento* → [Wikipedia](#).

<sup>2</sup> [Necrologio di Francesco Porro], *Scienza e tecnica*, 1 (Società Italiana per il Progresso delle Scienze, 1937), p. 60; trascritto nelle → [Fonti secondarie](#).

Balestrieri (1997), p. 603.

F. Alberico, *Le origini e lo sviluppo del fascismo a Genova: la violenza politica dal dopoguerra alla costituzione del regime* (Milano, UNICOPLI, 2009), nota 74 a p. 38, trascritta nelle → [Fonti secondarie](#).

<sup>3</sup> *Assalto all'Avanti!* in → [Wikipedia](#).

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<sup>4</sup> Balestrieri (1997), p. 603. S. Antonini, *Storia della Liguria durante il fascismo*, vol. 1, *Dal biennio rosso alla marcia su Roma. 1919-1922* (Genova, De Ferrari, 2003), p. 39.

<sup>5</sup> Balestrieri (1997), p. 603. Su Host Venturi → [DBI](#) (2004) e [Wikipedia](#). Sulla Legione → [Archivi del Novecento](#).

<sup>6</sup> [Necrologio di Francesco Porro], *Scienza e tecnica*, 1 (Società Italiana per il Progresso delle Scienze, 1937), p. 60; trascritto nelle → [Fonti secondarie](#). *D'Annunzio e il suo tempo: un bilancio critico. Atti del convegno di studi, Genova, 19-20-22-23 settembre 1989, Rapallo, 21 settembre 1989*, a cura di F. Perfetti, vol. 2 (Genova, Sagep, 1993), nota 156 a p. 348. Balestrieri (1997), p. 603. Alberico (2009), p. 75.

<sup>7</sup> G. Host-Venturi, *L'impresa fiumana* (Roma, G. Volpe, 1976), p. 72.

# Scientific interests

## CLASSICAL ASTRONOMY

- Mars' surface (with Schiaparelli)
- Variable stars' visual photometry
- Comets' astrometry, photometry and morphology
- Solar and lunar eclipses
- Stellar astrometry and fundamental catalogues

History of astronomy... geodesy, geography, glaciology, hydrography, meteorology, sismology... and spiritism!

# Fascism, pure and applied sciences

An example of event to deepen

Porro had to reduce a very large amount of data with insidious casual and sistematic errors: astrometric observations obtained by Giuseppe Piazzi with a large Ramsden's altazimuth circle (Palermo, 1792-1814).

In 1914 he gained some resources from University of Genoa and bought an Egli computing machine for his assistant. It was not enough. So he recommended to his University to create a center for scientific computing: without success.

The first **applied** mathematics institute was founded in Naples by Mauro Picone (1927) and only in 1965 the *Centro Nazionale Universitario di Calcolo Elettronico* was founded in Pisa!

# Fascism and astronomy in Italy

## Some more general questions

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

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 Italian astronomers might be really considered fascists in the following years?

# Some personal opinions

A closer examination of Porro's life and writings will be useful to answer those questions.

His weight in politics and science (at least in Italy) is more important than previously considered.

His negligible fame depends on some factors.

I. Porro did not establish an astronomical or a computing school that reminded him.

II. After the second world war, there was in Italy a belated but strong development of astrophysics.

# Last but not least...

Thanks to:

- Matteo Realdi, for information on the workshop;
- Pedro Ruiz-Castell, for accepting this contribution;
- Camilla Rotoli, Museo Galileo (Florence), for Porro's portrait;
- My wife Milena, for her patience.

And my apologies to all the participants: I cannot be with you in Valencia, but I'll answer by e-mail to your requests

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