

Experimental psychology at Padua University before the arrival of Vittorio Benussi

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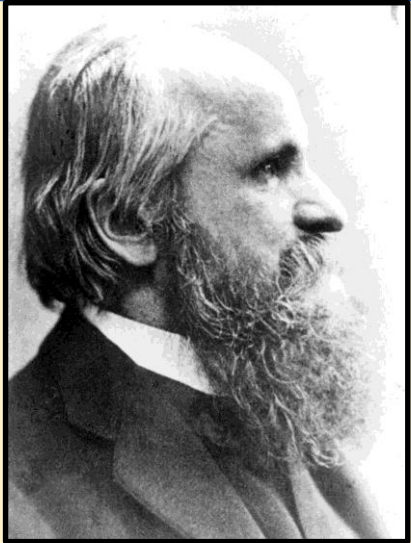
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- Usually, the establishment of both the teaching and the Laboratory of Experiment psychology at the University of Padova dates back to the unexpected arrival of Vittorio Benussi in 1919, who seemed to have built everything from nothing.
- Benussi, a pupil of Alexius Meinong, was probably among the leading psychologists of his time for his studies on perceptual illusions, timing and emotional states (Antonelli, 2018).
- The current historiography of psychology (e.g., Mecacci, 2019) pays little attention to the academic context already existing in Padua at the very beginning of the 20th century, and tends to concentrate only on Benussi's work.
- However, recent archival research (Bobbio & Giora, 2019a, 2019b) supported the fact that the philosopher Roberto Ardigò, father of Italian positivism, Professor of History of Philosophy in Padua from 1881 to 1909 and a basic experimenter himself (Giora & Büttemeyer, 2020), and some of his followers or pupils, already cultivated the discipline.
- In particular, Gino Melati, a philosopher also trained in physiology, in 1898 was sent by Ardigò to Leipzig at the renowned Institute directed by Wilhelm Wundt, where he spent two years as visiting researcher in auditory perception (Giora & Bobbio, 2020).
- Moreover, the physiologist Aristide Stefani, the anthropologist Enrico Tedeschi and the pedagogist Giovanni Marchesini promoted Experimental psychology in their respective Institutes – in the case of Marchesini for didactic purposes –; they bought experimental instruments and, subsequently, greatly helped Benussi to equip his Laboratory since 1920.

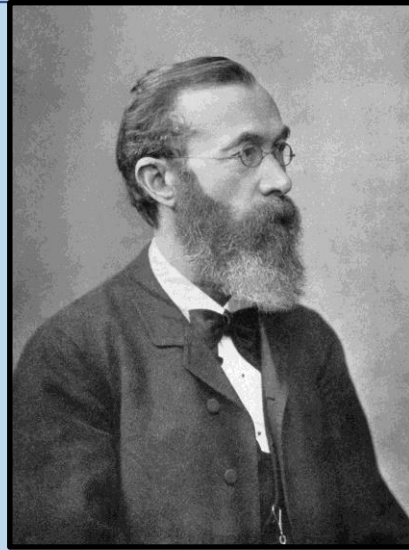




Meinong (1853-1920)

GRAZ
(1901-1918)

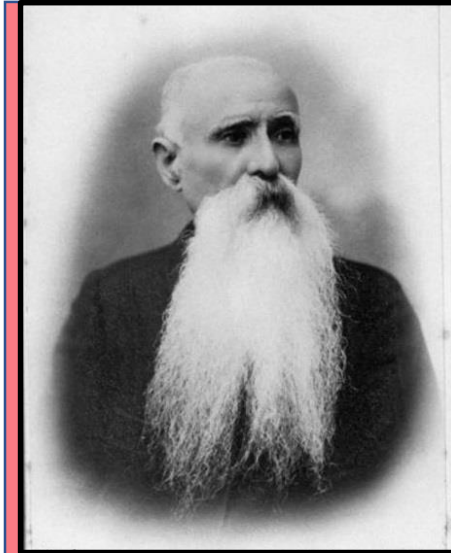
The Laboratory of Experimental psychology was made famous mainly because of Benussi's work.



Wundt (1832-1920)

LEIPZIG
(1898-1900)

His Laboratory of Experimental psychology was a research and training center known worldwide



Ardigò (1828-1920)

PADUA
(1881-1903)

Founder of Italian Positivism.

One of the main promoters of Experimental psychology in Italy

*Sent his pupil, **Melati**, to be trained in Leipzig with the intent to come back to Padua and to establish the discipline at University, along with laboratory research*

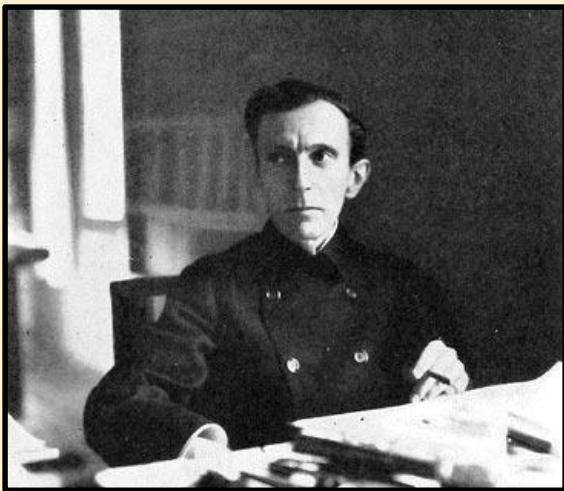


Benussi (1878-1927)

- Melati spent about two years at Wundt's Institute doing research on binaural beats.
- His results were published on *Philosophische Studien* (Melati, 1901).
- His attempt to get the *Privatdozentur* aborted in 1903.

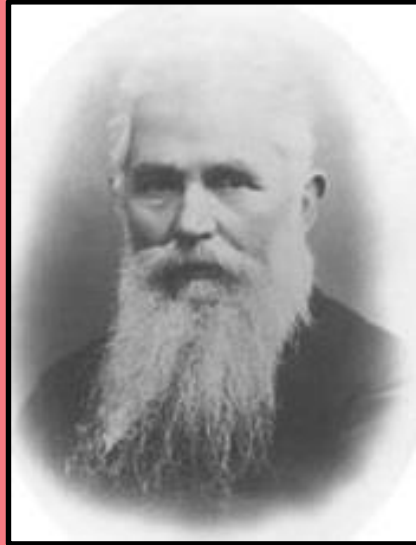
Melati (1873-1930)

**PADUA
(1919-1927)**

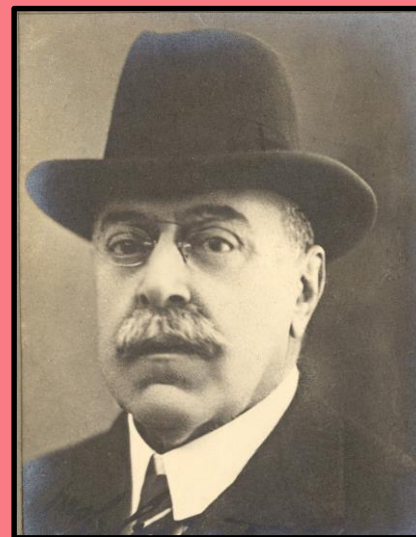
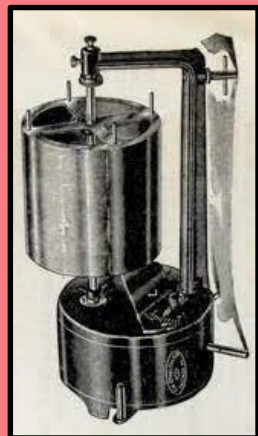


Benussi (1878-1927)

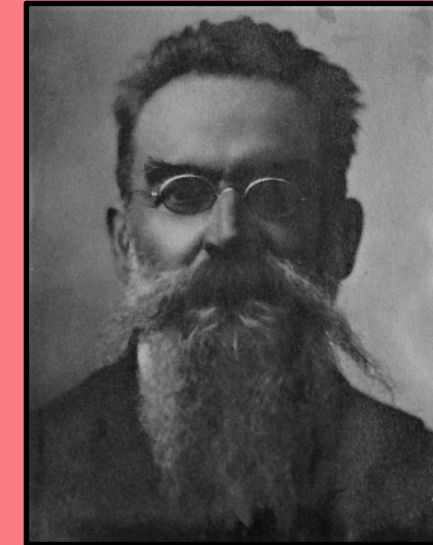
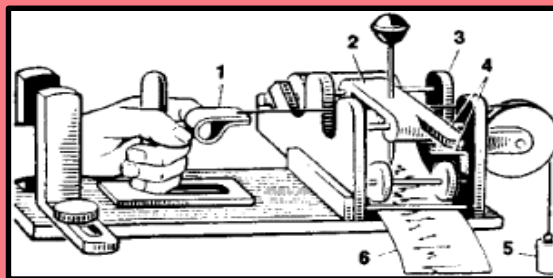
Only thanks to the generous support of colleagues from the Institutes of **Physiology** (Stefani), **Anthropology** (Tedeschi) and **Pedagogy** (Marchesini), by the end of 1920 Benussi could open his Laboratory and resume his experimental studies.



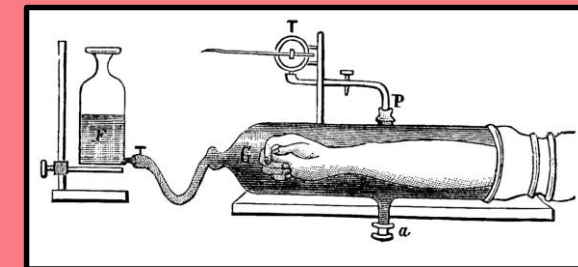
Stefani (1846-1925)
*He offered some of his **Kymographs** to Benussi.*



Tedeschi (1832-1920)
*Trained in Rome by Giuseppe Sergi and follower of Ardigò, he gave a lot of instruments to Benussi. Among them, the **Ergograph**.*



Marchesini (1868-1931)
*The most relevant pupil of Ardigò, he also borrowed several instruments to Benussi. Among them, the **Plethysmograph**.*



CONCLUSIONS

- Before Benussi, Experimental psychology was a portion of the teaching program of Theoretical philosophy or History of Philosophy held at the University of Padova by Baldassarre Poli (1795-1883), Antonio Rivato (1787-1876), Francesco Bonatelli (1830-1911), Roberto Ardigò (1828-1920), Adolfo Faggi (1868-1953), and Antonio Aliotta (1881-1964) (Giora & Bobbio, 2021).
- With the arrival of Benussi, psychology acquired autonomy as a natural science within the philosophical faculty.
- However, Benussi's contribution to Experimental psychology in Padua should be reviewed in the light of a more thorough and complex reconstruction of the academic context which, at that time, connected many of the so-called human sciences.

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