

**The Jew Who Died for the Love of a Fascist**

Gilda Cesana certainly wasn't expecting visitors at her apartment in the Calle della Sacrestia, a short distance from St. Mark's, that night of the 12<sup>th</sup> June 1945. But what type of criminal would knock so politely at the door? The war, in any event, had been over for several weeks. Life, from that moment on, would be better for everyone. In answer to the classical query of who's there from the other side of the door came the response "friends" - in the Venetian dialect - so that she was no longer afraid to open. She realized her mistake when she found five individuals in front of her, armed and hooded, yet she still found the courage to yell with all of the strength in her body, alerting her guest of that evening Maria Violato, a girl who came from near Padua visiting her uncle Gino Bondi, who lived downstairs, and who had asked Cesana if she could put his niece up for the night.



Gilda, despite being Jewish, during the twenty years of Fascism had been the lover of Dante Raffaele Bordignon, an officer in the Black Shirts. A circumstance which was well known in the city.

The man disappeared when the end became obvious, and following the event of the Liberation was being assiduously sought by the partisans and anti-Fascists. There were many who thought that the thirty-six year old Venetian woman knew where her lover was. In fact, the five masked men asked her where the fugitive was hiding: Gino Bondi testified to this later when, running up the stairs after having heard the woman scream, he at least succeeded in convincing the assailants that his niece had nothing to do with the woman, he took her back to his apartment and barring himself inside just in time to hear a final "I don't know, I swear!" before Gilda was fatally stabbed three times in the throat.

Attempts to save her life were in vain, even though quickly supplied by the Bondi family immediately following the attack. There was nothing that could be done for poor Cesana. Despite the man's testimony, the first motive given for the attack was that of a failed robbery attempt: disrupted by two unexpected witnesses, the robbers were frightened to the point of having killed the victim of their intended theft.

A month later, however, a twenty-six year old cobbler, Romano Potz, and his accomplice Carlo Campaiola were arrested for a robbery (real, this time). It was the latter of the two to confess to the police, revealing, in exchange for a lighter sentence, that a few evenings prior - after too much to drink - Potz had admitted to him that he had organized the killing of Gilda Cesana.

Up to the actual Liberation the cobbler had been a platoon leader in the civil police squadrons formed by ex-partisans, disbanded exactly a week before the woman's murder. It was most likely that the man had some arrears with Bordignon, and that he had decided, along with his men, to take matters into his own hands. He was accused and put on trial, while in the meantime - in May of 1946 - the fascist ex-"Repubblichino" was also captured; having gone underground, he'd continued his political activity publishing the newsletter "Revoluzione", in which he praised Il Duce and in endless hymns in favour of the return of Fascism in Italy.

The trial for Gilda Cesana's murder came to its conclusion in 1947. Potz defended himself by saying that he had only boasted to Campaiola and others about the woman's murder to make them think that he was a dangerous type, and to keep them at arms length. He wasn't believed, and was sentenced to seven years in prison, and was subsequently interned in a psychiatric hospital due to a partial mental deficiency discovered during the trial. The political motive was thrown out, and his sentence found for manslaughter during attempted robbery. The identity of his four accomplices was never revealed. Bordignon, who was tried in Verona, was, in the end, acquitted.

The only one to have paid, after all that had been said and done, was the woman, guilty of having loved and - probably - "covered" the fugitive. She was capable, even though Jewish, of dying for the love of a Fascist.