

# *Studi e interpretazioni/ Studies and interpretations*

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## THE CONSTITUTIONAL VIEW OF FOSCOLO IN *SCRITTI SULLE ISOLE IONIE*

### *Introduction*

After spending his all education age in Dalmatia, he was early twenty when he wrote his first juvenile texts and was already having also taken part in the political events of his time.

After his initial literary success, the relationship between his two aspects (literary and political) gradually began to get loosen: while the Venetian writer was actively following the republican developments, his spiritual father was pervaded by an antithetical disillusioned detachment from the political upheavals that were taking place<sup>1</sup>. On 17 October 1797, the Treaty of Campoformio was signed: Bonaparte's France was pledged to cede the Venetian Republic to the Habsburgs while the seven Ionian islands had already passed under French administration<sup>2</sup>. Foscolo interpreted the event as an outrageous betrayal of revolutionary principles and he decided to go on exile first in Florence and later in Milan<sup>3</sup>. However, he did not reduce his lit-

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<sup>1</sup> Chiancone (2012: 275 sgg.). Later, Foscolo was first in Venice and then in Bologna where he wrote the ode *A Bonaparte Liberatore*, dedicated to Reggio Emilia, the first city to raise the French insignia on Cispadane soil, and the sonnet *A Venezia*. In May 1797, he expressed his intention to work on *Timocrate*, a 'republican tragedy', the traces of which have, however, been lost. Cf. Cerruti (1990: 35-39).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Del Vento (2003: 73-75); see also Pagratis (2014: 329-348).

<sup>3</sup> But just two years later, Foscolo enrolled in the National Guard of the Cisalpine Republic and fought as a captain with Army General Fripoult's French troops until the battle of Marengo on 14 June 1800. Wounded in the battle of Cento, he was arrested by the Austrians during his escape and freed in Modena

erary activity in which he kept manifesting all his political radicalism, widely evident in his civil and journalistic commitment that had defined the previous years.

In the summer of 1799, he composed *Discorso su la Italia*. A lively text in which the ambitions of the Italian patriots akin to the French neo-Jacobins were condensed: the aim was to encourage the birth of an independent Italian Republic. In November of that same year, a new edition of the already famous ode *A Buonaparte* was published, which included the insertion of a new preface to the text through which Napoleon himself was exhorted not to centralize the whole dimension of power on himself; in other words, not to turn into a tyrant. Numerous evidences prove to us the democratic and revolutionary radicalism that features Foscolo's production between 1796 and 1799.

In that year, Foscolo re-published the ode *a Bonaparte Lib-eratore*, preceded by a polemical *dedicatoria* towards the French general, and he also composed the ode *A Luigia Pallavicini caduta da cavallo*. Between 1800 and 1801 he had a romantic affair with Isabella Roncioni, that became an inspirational for the development of *Teresa* character in this novella. In 1801 Foscolo returned to Milan, where he started a relationship with a noblewoman and intellectual, Antonietta Fagnani Arese, to whom he dedicated the ode *Alla Amica risanata* in 1803. In 1802 Foscolo completed and in 1803 published *Le Ultime of Jacopo Ortis*, a collection that comprehends two odes and sonnets written in those years, which include some of the most famous (the sonnet-self-portrait *Solcata ho fronte*, oppure *Occhi incavati intenti*, *Alla Sera*, *A Zacinto*, *In morte del fratello Giovanni*), followed by the *Commento alla «Chioma di Berenice»*. In 1804 the poet moved to France, on the coasts of the English Channel to serve under the Napoleonic army against England. Here the poet translates from Greek the *Iliad* and *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy* by Laurence Sterne from English to Italian. In 1806 Foscolo returned to Venice after the fall of Austrian rule; here he meets Cesarotti, Albrizzi and Pindemonte, towering figures that actively contributed to his poetic style. From the conversations he had during this staying and after

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(Foscolo, *Ep. I*, 296-297 [letter 210]). On Foscolo's presence in Emilia, cf. Ricci (1980: 37-40); on the epistle, see, among others, Parmeggiani (2015: 121-123).

the publication of the edict of Saint Cloud, Foscolo gathered the inspiration for the poem *I Sepolcri*. In 1808 Foscolo became Professor of Eloquence at the University of Pavia, where in 1809 he held an important academic speech entitled *Dell'Origine e dell'ufficio della Letteratura*. However, his position was soon revoked, due to bad relations with the Napoleonic regime. The relationship between Foscolo and power worsened further in 1811, at the performance of the tragedy *Aiace* in Milan. Between 1812 and 1813 he lived again between Bologna and Florence, working on a new tragedy, *Ricciarda*, and on the short poem *Le Grazie* and publishing the *Notizia dello Didimo Chierico*, an ironic and pseudo-autobiographical work which, together with the Sesto tome of the *Self*, Foscolo has already been working for years.

With the fall of Napoleon in 1814 and the consequent return of the Austrians to Milan, Foscolo refuses to compromise with the Austrian power, despite the authority would like to assign him the direction of a prestigious review, the *Biblioteca Italiana*.

On the night between 30 and 31 March the poet leaves Italy forever, he went into 'voluntary exile' in Switzerland where he completed a booklet entitled *Hypercalypseos liber singularis*, in which he raged against certain intellectuals, in particular Monti and Giordano, who had agreed to direct the *Biblioteca Italiana*, guilty therefore of having supported the Napoleonic governments in their ascendant period and now with extravagant ease became supporters of the new Austrian hegemony (Cerruti 1990: 134). The period he spent in Switzerland from 1816 was characterized by a considerable amount of political and civil reflections. Foscolo's intellectual activity intensified, nevertheless, the pressure of the Helvetic police led him to a new exile to England, that lasted from September 1816 until his death in 1827 (Borsa 2017: 41-53). Without totally abandoning positions of radicalism, a careful examination of the texts shows, however, that Foscolo, an attentive reader of Hobbes and Diderot, moved from the democratic and jacobin positions of his youth to a form of theoretical pragmatism in which the influences of Machiavelli, Vico and Montesquieu lead to an authentic conception of history, praxis and the role of the writer in society (Beltrami 2020: 332). In this regard, we note first of all the rapidity

with which he appropriates a libertarian rhetoric to which he later substitutes other forms of civil eloquence (Neppi 2009: 166).

During these English years he wrote *Saggi su Petrarca*, and *Lettere scritte dall'Inghilterra*, a political non-fiction production flourished among the others. The poet started the *Storia del regno italico* and the article *An Account of the Revolution of Naples during the Year 1798-1799*<sup>4</sup>. With an eye on his own Greece, which at that time was undergoing an intense and difficult phase of administrative emancipation. The aim object of this essay concerns in particular, the reflections on the events of Parga anticipated by *Lo Stato politico delle Isole Ionie*.

### 1. From 1795

Foscolo's juvenile anti-tyrannical positions are also evidenced in the tragedy *Tieste*, written October 1795. Compared to the aristocratic horizon that distinguishes Alfieri's tragedies, and even though scrupulously following the Aristotelian rules that define tragedy as a *genre*, Foscolo composed a more modern drama. The *Tieste* was indeed a part of the process of a progressive distancing from Alfieri's style (Del Vento 2003: 39-40). A few months after the tragedy's debut on stage, Foscolo's notoriety in the Venetian democratic *milieu*, increased. His escape to Bologna, at the end of April 1797, led to his election by acclamation as member of the Società di Istruzione Pubblica. At first, Foscolo's interventions in this institute seem limited to recalling of the universal (even if politically elementary) principles and maxims, rather than clearly identifying the current political problems<sup>5</sup>. In *Tieste*, we can widely appreciate certain elements that will mark Foscolo's political reflection. In the Venetian intellectual arena, Foscolo completed his political apprenticeship during the months that marked the inevitable Republic's fall after the French invasion. Curiously, Foscolo became acquainted with Vico's writings in Venice, taking advantage of the reception

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<sup>4</sup> For a general overview of Foscolo's poetics of exile see Combon (1975: 123-142); or Guadenzi (2002: 217-233).

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Pastore Stocchi (1986: 37-38).

that Vico's philosophical and theoretical scenario received by Venetian scholars of the time. In Foscolo's thinking, the Neapolitan philosopher was a widespread presence in a sort of dialectical continuity with European culture. Vico's lesson had been received by Venetian culture in the light of the current English experimental and empiricist encyclopaedism and the suggestions of the legendary Ossian, whose philosophical coordinates are traced in the opening of the *Piano di Studi*, or even in the *Commento alla Chioma di Berenice*. It was therefore both Venetian culture before Neapolitan culture that bequeathed to Foscolo the Vico's interest in poetry, as an instrument to investigate the remotest and primitive history's phases.

In the few years of the Republic, Venice had been the scene of an intense debate on the possibility of transforming the Italian peninsula into a nation modeled on revolutionary France. The French ambassador in Venice, Jean Baptiste Lallement, insisted on the difficulties of unifying the different populations of the Italian provinces. Bonaparte had still declared himself in favor of the unitary project. In this climate of high hopes, in which the Directoire already appeared as a dangerous enemy, the Treaty of Campoformio not only marked a serious setback, but also represented a symbolic event with respect to subsequent political developments. The aspiration for an Italian nation-state pre-dated the first disappointment of Italian patriots for the policies of the French Directory<sup>6</sup>. The unitarian project was not conceived in an anti-French function, but represented from the outset one of the two political alternatives in the construction of a democratic and egalitarian Republic<sup>7</sup>. Foscolo expressed the voices of those Venetian patriots who were inevitably disappointed by Bonaparte's betrayal, while the democratic groups beyond the Alps welcomed the treaty with moderate enthusiasm, as the first step of a subsequent Cisalpine's unification. It became clear that the Cisalpine Republic could be the center of an expansionist project to the detriment of the old states that had survived the treaty (from Naples to Piedmont, from Tuscany to Rome) or erected into still independent demo-

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<sup>6</sup> On the relationship between the register of Italian patriots and their political positions, see Zagli (1986: 735-793).

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Rao (1992: 124-25).

cratic republics like Liguria. In Italy, patriots could count on the support of the upper echelons of the *Armée de Italie*, who were in favor of a quick resumption of the war on the peninsula and its unification into a democratic republic. The opponents of this project were the moderate ruling groups representing the Italian upper middle class and the old aristocracy who had agreed to collaborate with the French government. Since November 1797, Bonaparte had left the government of the Cisalpine Republic in their hands, and as the months went by, they attempted to accept the Directory's protectorate. On the Italian exchequer, there was not only an internal clash in the Cisalpine political balances, limited to the claim of full sovereignty by the weak 'sister republic' towards the 'Grand Nation'; there was also a political battle of much greater dimensions that transversally opposed the moderate and democratic ruling groups of the two countries. Foscolo was a protagonist of this clash and his path was common to that of many exponents of Italian democratism (Del Vento 2003: 70). Between the end of 1797 and the early months of 1798, Venice was ruled by a moderate group within which the conspiracy of 12th October would not have taken place. It was at this time that, having left his post at the Società di Istruzione Pubblica, Foscolo moved to Milan, finding a political situation distinguished by the division between the moderate bloc and a fierce patriotic front. Soon the young revolutionary had to face the harsh reality of a difficult integration within the Cisalpine Republic: in this climate, it is understandable why the Cisalpine democrats entrusted the young writer with the direction of the *Monitore Italiano*. In the newspaper's *Plan* of January 1798, we find the guidelines that inspired Foscolo's journalistic activity during the Revolutionary Triennium and during the Italian Republic. The main objective of the newspaper was to narrate the civil and political history of the newly independent Republic, for which purpose it was necessary to instruct readers to raise the level of attention towards the work of the institutions. From this perspective, Foscolo's defense of the importance of teaching both Italian and Latin at school was not the result of a narrow cultural nationalism. It rather identified the tradition as an antidote against the excesses of reason as previously expressed in the sonnet *All'Italia*,

written in 1798. It was evident that for those who, like Foscolo, had espoused the unitary solution, the fragile linguistic unity that had been preserved even at the literary level represented a precious point of reference for endowing Italy with a common language. For Foscolo, the reform of language referred back to that of literature and thus to the question of national independence (Del Vento 2003: 85).

It is in this climate of confrontation that the drafting of the sonnet *Te nutrice alle muse...*, written by Foscolo on the occasion of the proposal to suppress the teaching of Latin, discussed in August 1798 by the Cisalpine Grand Council and published probably in a short collection of seven sonnets with an amorous theme, takes place. For Foscolo, the decision to limit and almost suppress the study of Latin had a symbolic value. It is not a coincidence that in September 1801, at a time when the Cisalpine Republic was close to a decisive political turning point, Foscolo made a reprint of the *Ode to Bonaparte Liberator* and the sonnet *Te nutrice alle muse...* in the *Parnasso Democratico*. Starting with the October 1802 edition in Pisa, the allocution *All'Italia* contained in the title disappeared and as well as the harsh anti-French allusion of the last verse.

## 1.2 Foscolo's exile in Bologna and the Jacopo Ortis' ideation

After the coup d'état carried out on the night of 1 September 1798 by the French ambassador Claude Trouvé, among other things, caution advised Foscolo and many other patriots to withdraw from political activism or, to leave Milan at least. Foscolo moved to Bologna, where, still in collaboration with his brother Gian Dionigi, they started a new periodical entitled *Genio Democratico*, in absence of financial support of any sort. An echo of the events of those weeks can be found, in fact, in the Bologna edition of the *Ultime Lettere di Jacopo Ortis*. At the end of the first part, a vivid portrait of the anarchy that dominated the Cisalpine Republic is offered through Lorenzo's words.

Personal and political reasons marked the foundation of the *Genio Democratico*, which already hinted at its program from its title. It has already been noted how Foscolo had constructed

the long essay *National Independence* on the basis of a non-utopian political ideal of a national state<sup>8</sup>. The patriots' project aimed at a widespread diffusion of private property unanimously recognized as the foundation of popular sovereignty that would allow every individual to participate in the political life of the nation<sup>9</sup>.

In November 1798, the new political balance in favor of the democrats and his friendship with Giuseppe Fantuzzi, opened up to him the possibility to obtain a job as Adjutant to the Chancellor of the Court of Bologna. The following April, however, the Austro-Russian invasion and the retreat of the French army forced the Venetian poet to leave the city. Thus it was in July 1799 that Foscolo found himself in Genoa with the remnants of Macdonald's army en route after the Battle of the Trebbia altogether with many friends and acquaintances such as Luigi Bossi, General Giuseppe Fantuzzi, the poet Giovanni Fantoni, Giulio Ceroni and Marc Antoine Jullienn. The Ligurian city had become in those weeks the obligatory crossroads for thousands of people, soldiers and refugees from all over Italy and the bridgehead of any possible counter-offensive in the Peninsula. The patriots, who remained in Italy, elevated Genoa as their political laboratory, raising French military hierarchy's concern. Their aim was the realization of the unitarian project, hoping for a French move in that sense. But on October 1799, the Ligurian government decreed the expulsion of the Italian refugees. After the defeat of General Joubert on 15th August at Novi, who had made no secret of his Jacobin sympathies, the patriots now pinned all their hopes on General Championnet, who reached Genoa on 20th September. Foscolo would have addressed to him his famous *Discorso su la Italia* just twenty days later, and published by the printer Frugoni. This latter work was part of a very precise strategy aimed at overcoming the internal polemics of the patriots' front and represented the project of an Italian Republic and the relative army. This initiative must have been encouraged by Championnet himself who, as soon as he arrived in Liguria, had invited all the other expatriated patriots to support his military efforts. Leaving aside the

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<sup>8</sup> See the brief introductory note in Gavazzeni (2004: 1064).

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Del Vento (2003: 99-100).



more specifically historical reconstruction of the circumstances in which it saw the light of day, the fact remains that the revolutionary writing of the *Discorso su la Italia* stands out as a qualifying moment of an intense formal experimentation that, between 1799 and 1801, saw Foscolo engaged, always seeking new alternatives registers. The *Discorso su la Italia* was written a few weeks before the new dedication of the *Ode to Bonaparte Liberatore*, that would have opened the first real rupture with the French revolutionary ideals. However, the death of Championnet, to whom the patriots had entrusted their hopes, symbolically ended the experiences and projects matured in those years by Italian patriots.

Although in 1803 the stylistic and textual strategies of the *Discorso su la Italia* appeared distant to Foscolo, the need to reflect on the mechanisms that had allowed religion to favor the consolidation of the Napoleonic regime, suggested to Foscolo to recover Jullien's political lesson that resurfaced few years later in the fragmentary *Discorsi su Lucrezio*.

In the climate following 18 Brumaire, support for Bonaparte was almost unanimous even among the 'Républicains Prononcés'. Although the patriots no longer saw the Jacobin general in him, they believed that his rise to power would be conducive to his plans<sup>10</sup>. Foscoli's dedicatory was the result of the general conviction that a resumption of the war in Italy was imminent<sup>11</sup>. The young writer thus interpreted the expectations of the besieged patriots in Genoa who were confident that the figure of the 'Liberator General', tarnished by the memory of the Treaty of Campoformio, would find a new and decisive opportunity for redemption by overturning the Directoire's Italian policy. In portraying Bonaparte as a restorer of Italian liberty, Foscolo made himself the interpreter of a climate shared by patriots and moderates alike, both those who had emigrated to France and those besieged in Genoa. The poet manifested the positions and new perspectives of the patriotic circles: the ruin of Italy had been the work of the 'spoiled men of ancient servitude and the new license', skilfully exploited by one and the other by the Directory's policy of robbery; freedom, therefore,

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. M. Cerruti (1990: 60).

<sup>11</sup> See also Rao (1992: 29).

could only be restored by the man who first founded it, Bonaparte, since the revolution of Italy had been his work (En. VI, 163-164). Even before the battle of Marengo, Bonaparte's return seemed to re-propose the favorable conditions for the democratization and independence of the Peninsula previously presented during the Italian campaign of 1796.

### 1.3 *Between Plutarch and Vico*

As seen, an important part of the young Foscolo's cultural education prior to the Milanese experience had been strongly marked by the Venetian culture, the Baconian empiricism and the unique rereading of Vico influenced by English encyclopaedism. But almost all the texts of the colossal philosophical battle that had culminated in the end of the *Ancient R gime* can also be found in his education. Just think of the massive presence of Rousseau or Montesquieu in the political reflection of the *Piano di Studj*. Foscolo confronted himself with the political, social and cultural myths and themes that shaped the European Neoclassicism during the 18th century. In the literary debates with which Foscolo had already got in contact during his education and which he now found re-proposed in Public Education Societies and constitutional circles or in the columns of various periodicals. It is precisely around these themes that the frequent evocations of Sparta and Republican Rome are arranged in Foscolo's work. This is the case of the democratic myths of the agrarian laws and the Gracchi brothers, whose impassioned celebration in the ode *Ai Novelli Repubblicani* opens the long series of references to classical antiquity in Foscolo's work, mostly inspired by Plutarch. The two tribunes are representatives of that libertarian heroism, that ethos and that desperate political and civic passion that, projected into the exemplary reality of ancient republics, permeate all of Foscolo's early works (Del Vento 2003: 160). But the Venetian poet also concentrates on the figure of the legendary Lycurgus: in the wake of a line of thought that had been gaining ground in the last decades of the century, the traditional comparison between Sparta, pointed out as a historically unrepeatable experience of equality and virtue, and Athens, rich and opulent, capable of

guaranteeing all its citizens a dignified and happy existence and of fostering man's path towards perfectibility, had always ended in favor of the latter. If the Spartan myth cannot be traced back to the French Jacobins, the Terror-Virtue pair itself was by no means part of the laconic tradition of the time. It was only after Thermidor that the supposed desire to imitate classical antiquity began to be seen as the root of the Terror, now perceived as a laconic experience compared to the democratic practice introduced by the proclamation of the French Republic, and as such the image of Sparta began to be condemned. The main creator of this reinterpretation was the ideologue Constantin Volney, who assimilated the Jacobins, for the first time defined as disciples of Rousseau, to the ancient Spartans: the Sparta myth began to be recovered within the neo-Jacobian left. Only then was the figure of Lycurgus juxtaposed with that of the Gracchi, who symbolized the perfect legislators. (Del Vento 2003: 168-169). According to Volney's judgment in *Leçons d'Histoire*, the French revolutionaries had dreamt of the ancient democracy, the classical society, but had overlooked one macroscopic character: it was a democracy founded on slave labour<sup>12</sup>.

Symbolically dated 'Firenze, Gennaio 1801', the *Proemio sopra gli Uomini illustri di Plutarco* (*Proem on Plutarch's Illustrious Men*) represents the first testimony of Foscolo's faith in classical antiquity and the extreme attempt to turn to the great personalities of the Grecian- Roman personalities a model for his own time. It seems to announce the profound change of perspective that will accompany the most important part of Foscolo's literary production, from the *Last Letters of Jacopo Ortis*, to the *Sepolcri*, to the *Grazie*<sup>13</sup>. Having dropped, with the *Proemio sopra gli Uomini illustri di Plutarco*, the utopia of a moralizing classicism of Grecian-Roman inspiration, Foscolo's classicism became a sort of archetypal space, now intangible and lost. The places and people evoked are nothing but metaphors of a distant world felt to be irreparably lost: in Foscolo's evocation, his

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<sup>12</sup> Canfora (1980: 16).

<sup>13</sup> Foscolo's pessimistic realism tends to break down the vision of an Antiquity all sublime and superior to the cowardice of modern times (Timpanaro 1981: 31)

native Zakynthos becomes Ellas, where nature and history coincide and where only childlike humanity can prosper. Foscolo's Ulysses returned to that nature that history had separated him from, namely the Trojan War: in this sense, think of the *Graces* where the split between man and nature is symbolized between love and the *Graces* and the Trojan War is the consequence. The poet's personal destiny ends with a very different perspective: the failure to reunite with the Earth-mother even after death<sup>14</sup>.

In this respect, the close reversal of the opposition between the primitive and ancient world, understood as *physis* and the modern world understood as *thêsis*<sup>15</sup>, would translate in Foscolo into the progressive enlargement of the domain of *thesis* to the whole of human history and the overcoming of the idea of the reformation of history through art and aesthetic education. This affirms an idea of history understood as an open and ever-renewing process, which does not allow for backward rethinking, incompatible therefore with the idea of 'repatriation' that presupposed a condemnatory sentence on the whole of history, considered as a progressive fall from a state of original happiness<sup>16</sup>.

## 2. *Reflections on the crisis of the Jacobin republics*

Between the end of 1800 and the beginning of the following year, Foscolo moved to Milan where he took part in the activities of the Accademia Letteraria, which was, however, short-lived and its closure, in the spring of 1801, was not due to the intervention of the Cisalpine government, but at the behest of its founder himself. The reasons for this decision are unclear, but perhaps the new role assumed in those months by the Ministry of War, of which Lancetti was the powerful secretary-general, was not extraneous. It became not only the center of the patriots' initiatives, but the hidden financier of the Milanese printing house itself, as demonstrated by the publishing events

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. Del Vento (2003: 180-181).

<sup>15</sup> See Auerbach (1970: 102-114).

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Del Vento (2003: 186-191).

of Vincenzo Cuoco's historical essay<sup>17</sup>. The interest and commitment of the Cisalpine democratic circles for a reform of Italian literature and culture did not wane, as was demonstrated in the following months by an ambitious publishing initiative, the genesis of which can be traced back to the debates of the Milanese Literary Academy: the *Democratic Parnassus*. This last essay, which was probably printed around the end of September 1801, was the most ambitious of the republican poetry collections that appeared during the revolutionary period. Some of the best writers of the time (from Monti to Fantoni, via Pindemonte and Foscolo himself) agreed to publish their often unpublished poems in it. The official editor Giuseppe Brenasconi seems to have been a second-rate figure in the group of unitarian patriots, and it can be assumed that he did not put together the ambitious poetic anthology of *Parnasso*<sup>18</sup> on his own.

The historical significance of Foscoloni's writing in those months, as already noted on the occasion of the *Discorso su la Italia* and the *Orazione a Bonaparte*, would escape us if we read it outside of the literary debates and political publicity that had as its epicenter the Cisalpine democratic circles. This is the case with the *Commentari della Storia di Napoli* that represent the thematic and stylistic embryo of the *Orazione a Bonaparte*. With the *Commentari*, which were to be followed by the books *Commentari cisalpini* (En. VI, LX-LXIII), Foscolo certainly did not intend to offer yet another narration of the tragic events of the spring of 1799, but rather to question the crisis of the Jacobin republics. The *Commentari*, a vast fresco of Italian history from 1789 to the return of the French in 1800, was part of the broader debate on the constitutional reform of the Cisalpine Republic and the possibility of overcoming the political division of the Peninsula imposed by the Directory. Unlike Cuoco, Foscolo did not identify the cause of the ruin of the Neapolitan Republic and the other Jacobin republics in the errors of southern patriots or in superstitious nature. Instead, the Venetian poet sets his *Commentaries* on the common condemnation of the Sanfedists and the French, or rather the policy of the Directory and its executors in Italy. That project was part of the propa-

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<sup>17</sup> See De Francesco (1997: 45-46). See also Quondam (2011: 66-68).

<sup>18</sup> On the *Parnasso Democratico*, cf. Tongiorgi (1997: 130-144).

ganda campaign organized by Lancetti and the Minister of War, Pietro Teulié (En. VI, CXLIV-CXLVI). On the other hand, in the short space of a few weeks Foscolo was also involved in the organization of a real Cisalpine army, the realizing nucleus of the future national state<sup>19</sup>. Initially, Foscolo received from Teulié the task of translating some French works that were needed for the reorganization of the Cisalpine army (Ep. I, 430), a testimony to which could be the *Regolamento per lo servizio della Infanteria francese in campagna*, commissioned by Lancetti and published by the Tipografia Milanese in 1801<sup>20</sup>.

Between the end of that year and 1802, Foscolo drafted a new Orazione a Bonaparte for the Congress of Lione: in these pages, Foscolo proposed a constitutional solution capable of guaranteeing the specificity of Italy and the survival of the Cisalpine Republic, safeguarding its autonomy and political dignity from French dominance<sup>21</sup>: a choice that, as Lomonaco thought, would root civil order and a sense of institutions in the multitude, bringing the revolution to a complete realization. The *Oration* was therefore neither a simple glorification of Napoleon written by a man of letters in perpetual search of public office to pay his debts, but then unable to silence his conscience as a citizen and writer, nor a generic denunciation of the thefts and embezzlements that sinisterly marked the notorious government of Sommaria and Ruga.

Summarizing the conclusions of the debate that took place among the Cisalpine democrats on the eve of Lione, Foscolo proposed a constitution that, in order to strengthen the consensus around the new republic, would be respectful of Italy's national character and avoid the risks of authoritarian involution linked to the prevalence of executive over legislative power.

In the spring of 1803, the famous Ceroni affair provoked a both political and literary scandal, and an institutional crisis that followed marked the defeat of the unity party between moderates and radical democrats. The patriotic circles had to give up their aspirations, abandoning all their hopes for establishing a national state on the Italian peninsula. Indeed, 1803

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<sup>19</sup> See Della Peruta (1988)

<sup>20</sup> Del Vento (2003: 138-139).

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Rao (1992: 440).

marked, much more than the *Lione Rallies* in 1802 or the founding of the Kingdom of Italy in 1805, the end of any residual political autonomy of the Italian government. The first sign of a radical political change was at the end of January 1803 the re-establishment of censorship, which was only abolished in 1806 at Napoleon's express wish. The administration was drastically reformed and a mass purge was carried out, of which Francesco Lomonaco and Vincenzo Cuoco were also victims. The adhesion of a large part of the patriots to the new order was, therefore, neither a conservative retreat nor a precise field choice in favor of Bonapartist authoritarianism. Many of them, like Cuoco for example, conceived collaboration with Melzi's government as participation in a political line with the necessary requirements to protect national independence and, above all, to stabilize the new state<sup>22</sup>. This choice had the effect of dividing the front of patriots: if many believed that the Napoleonic political framework, guaranteed by Francesco Melzi's prudent freedom of initiative, could allow the process of development of national society, others like Foscolo, foreseeing the inevitable regime's involution, had no faith in the resumption of a democratic political debate. It was perhaps the organicity of Cuoco's project to Melzi's program that suggested to Foscolo, in December 1803, the idea of creating a new authoritative instrument of information, both literary and political, that would give a voice to those who had not renounced collaborating with the official power after the Lyon rallies but had then found themselves in opposition. In this context, the bilingual *Diario Italiano* was born in open competition with Cuoco's *Giornale Italiano*, even though Foscolo's *Diario Italiano* did not enjoy the same conspicuous government funding. The *Diario*, in fact, closed after three issues without Melzi, who was concerned about the collaborators of this extreme experience of democratic journalism, intervening in any way to guarantee its survival<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> See De Francesco (1997: 65-68).

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Del Vento (1999: 228-238).

## 2.1 Foscolo political wanderer (1806-1815)

These changes also coincide with a change in the idea of classicism that had infatuated Foscolo until a few years earlier. Influenced by his readings of Vico, the Venetian thinker believed that poets would be able to interpret the true purpose of poetry, namely to search through the historical and theological roots of their nation, a guide for the modern writer. Foscolo thus freed the concept of exemplarity from that of the 'ancient', pointing the way out of the crisis of modern poetry, not so much in the impossible recovery of an antiquity that is no longer distinguishable from the present, but in the adaptation of the poet to the genius and customs of his own time (En. I, 134). For this reason, the *Sepolcri* was perceived by his contemporaries as a radically new work in collision with the previous poetic tradition. The reflection on the absence of an ideal continuity between the ancient and modern worlds was translated into the poetic celebration of the vanquished of all epochs; and so again in the *Sermon of 1806*, the lucid recognition of the equal state of both injustice and unhappiness that characterizes primitive societies compared to modern ones was made clear (Del Vento 2003: 259-261). From this point of view, however, there is no concession to supposedly early Romantic or romantic instances, but neither can it be translated into a new interpretation of the modern world as the introduction of real elements of human liberation, as was claimed by the optimistic proponents of human perfectibility<sup>24</sup>. Foscoli's poetics is now deeply permeated by the instances of an anthropology inspired by Lucretius and Machiavelli, and the theme of progress and the perfectibility of mankind becomes a central theme as demonstrated by the many fragments of the *Discorsi delle Servitù dell'Italia* dedicated to this debate that had found fertile ground for development in Tamburini's Pavia.

The carme *Dei sepolcri* was written between August 1806 and April 1807, and published that year in Brescia, at the publisher Niccolò Bettoni. At the same time as the *Sepolcri*, Foscolo undertook the translation of the first book of the *Iliad*, agreeing

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<sup>24</sup> On the 18th and later 19th century discussion on human perfectibility, see Rigotti (1981: 105-110).



with Monti that it should be published together with his version of the first book. Following a meticulous philological and semantic correspondence between the Greek text and the Italian reduction, Foscolo completed the first seven books<sup>25</sup>. Relieved of his military assignments by interest, the Venetian poet applied for the chair of Eloquence at the University of Pavia, which he obtained on 18 March 1808, held until 15 June 1809, when Napoleon suppressed the chair. In that year he returned for the third time to Milan, where less than a year later he ultimately broke the intellectual relationship with Monti, to which was added the failure of the tragedy *l'AJace*, banned for its anti-French allusions. In 1812 the poet moved to Florence, after stopping in Piacenza, Parma and Bologna again. Here, he began writing the hymn *Alle Grazie*, destined to take shape in a tripartite carme in April 1813<sup>26</sup>. In Bologna, he became to participate to the Countess of Albany's parlor, an Alfieri's friend. In the same year he completed the tragedy *Ricciarda*, the translation of *Viaggio sentimentale*, accompanied by the *Notizia intorno a Didimo Chierico*, as well as translating other cantos from the *Iliad*.

After Bonaparte's defeat at the Battle of Leipzig in October 1813 and his abdication in 1814, Foscolo returned to live in Milan for the fourth time, resuming his rank in the army to make a desperate attempt to gather men willing to sacrifice themselves for the city, but as the *Lettera Apologetica* shows, the arrival of the Austrians in the city demoralized his last aspirations. It was the Austrian governor Field Marshal Bellegarde who offered him to direct the literary journal *Biblioteca italiana*, but upon his swearing in to the new Habsburg regime in March 1815, he left Italy for voluntary exile in Hottingen, Switzerland, where he took the pseudonyms of Lorenzo Aldighieri and, in literary terms, Didimo Chierico. Despite the controls of the Austrian police, he managed to print in Zurich in 1816 the *Vestigia della storia del sonetto italiano*, the satirical booklet against the Milanese literati *Didimi clerici prophetae minimi Hypercalypseos liber singularis*, the third edition of *Ortis*.

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<sup>25</sup> See Terzoli (2000: 76-78).

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Nicoletti (2006: 32).

### 3. *The question of Parga*

Parga was under the rule of the Venetian State from the Peace of Passarowitz in 1718 until the end of the Venetian Republic in 1797: an enclave facing the Ionian Islands also long that were also under the control of the Doge for a long period of time<sup>27</sup>. Having taken Venice during the first Italian campaign, Napoleon granted Parga to the Austrian Empire. There was the subsequent conquest by the Russians, who ceded Parga to the Ottoman Empire, concluded by the Treaty of Constantinople on 21 March 1800<sup>28</sup>. After the Peace of Tilsit in 1807, the territory once again came under French occupation; but in a very short time, the city found itself under British rule: in exchange for the recognition of the protectorate over the Ionian Islands, the British ceded Parga back to the Ottoman Empire in 1817<sup>29</sup>. As a result there was an exodus of the Greek ethnic population of Parga, who at first refused to accept the new Turkish occupation. An exodus of the Greek ethnic population of Parga ensued, as they at first refused to accept the new Turkish occupation<sup>30</sup>. However, on Good Friday 1819, the Orthodox cemeteries

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<sup>27</sup> See, among others, Verdino (2020: 341-354). On Foscolo's brief exile in Switzerland, see Martinola (1980: 21-39).

<sup>28</sup> Beltrami (2020: 327-328); on Napoleonic intrusions on the Ionian Islands, see also D'Onofrio (2023: 72-91).

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Croce (1949: 186-203); see Scotti (1997: 285-309); recently, Borsa (2017: 41-53).

<sup>30</sup> The episode was also recalled by Giovanni Berchet and Francesco Hayez Painted by Hayez in 1831 and inspired by the poem of the same name by Giovanni Berchet, written between 1821 and 1823, *I profughi di Parga* refers to an episode of the Greek-Turkish war: the destruction by the Turks of the Greek city of Parga. Here too, the historical reconstruction refers back to the facts and aspirations of the Risorgimento, as it exalts the heroism of a people who had fought for their convictions and their faith. The story is translated with a great charge of sentimental participation that Hayez achieves with the theatrical character typical of his works with a historical-patriotic subject. The city perched on the hill has a double function. The first is to create a spectacular scenic backdrop, played out in the effects of backlighting and the degrading colors of the landscape at sunset. The second function is to separate the central part from the side wings seen in the distance. In the latter areas Hayez narrates the historical fact by showing the exodus of the population on the left, the ships on the open sea on the right. In the foreground he places the Greek people experiencing the tragedy at first hand. The men with their eyes to the sky, the women with children in their arms, the physical proximity, are expedients with

were burnt by the troops of Ali Pasha and the population of Greek origin was forced to emigrate en masse to the island of Corfu which had meanwhile remained in British hands<sup>31</sup>.

At the very end of the same year, in the form of a review of three works on the subject of the Greek-Turkish war, Foscolo published an important article entitled *On Parga* in the influential political journal *Edinburgh Review* (Giulio 2018: 60). A premise to a much more substantial piece of writing, the article caused a sensation and concern: the betrayal of the people of Parga became the subject of literary works also thanks to the enormous public resonance it received. Shortly after writing the article, Foscolo drafted a much fuller text on the circumstances in Parga: an authentic treatise that was, however, withdrawn from print without the Venetian author being able to finalize its conclusions (Ravera 2016: 112-114). The 1820 text was entitled *Narrative of events illustrating the Fortunes ad cession of Parga* (Del Vento 2003: 111-134): the aim was to provide a linear account of the events surrounding the cession of the Greek city. Foscolo's sources took their cue from the documentation sent by the secretary of the Parga community Mauroyannis, who traced a varied outline of the whole issue of the unfortunate town on the Ionian coast. The 'libro inglese' consisted of three chapters through which the writer would illustrate Parga's history, places, customs, social and political trends, in order to justify the need for an independent statute for the city (Nicoletti 2006: 311).

Within the sad Greek story, the author recounts the exodus of the population in the collective drama characterized by the French betrayal, clearly distinguishing the primary role of the men in defense of the city's children, women and elderly people. The description of the antagonist Ali, who had offended and calumniated Parga's resistant community, is also evident, and considered false by Foscolo. Nevertheless, the Italian revolu-

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a strong sentimental impact to allude to a brotherhood and a sort of choral singing with a clear moralizing and patriotic intent. For an analysis of Hayez's canvas, see Leone-Mazzocca, 2019; for an overview of Berchet's Parga, see Manganaro (2014: 135-157).

<sup>31</sup> They would only return to the continent in February 1913 when a large part of Epirus was re-annexed to Greece (cf. Kostis 2002: 59-64).

tionary exalted the beauty and audacity of the Greek fighters (Giulio 2018, 60-62). A profound connection with the Orthodox faith and the importance of Greek symbolic language unfolds from the poem, emphasizing, in this case, the presence of God despite the apparent as well as temporary abandonment.

As anticipated in John Murray's summer catalogue, the work should have been published at the end of 1819, but the contextual events of the constitutional revolution in Naples in 1820 also had an impact on the considerations of the English rulers about the accusations against the Holy Alliance contained in the book. Bound to government men, although not withdrawing his commitment, publisher Murray was hesitant and thought it best to wait until the unrest of the political situation had subsided (Colombo 2014: 54-120). Welcomed in England with courtesy, Foscolo, who particularly feared the Alien Bill, he decided not to publish the article he previously wrote that harshly criticized Whigs's political views on the Parga's question. Moreover, Foscolo questioned the whole internal parliamentary dialectic that featured the English political scenario of the time, accusing it to underestimate the importance of Parma's independence (Isabella 2009: 65-91).

### 3.1. *The issue of the Ionian Islands anticipating Parga*

The history of Parga is firmly intertwined with that of the Ionian Islands and the other mainland cities on the coast of Epirus, that over the centuries had suffered foreign domination by other European powers and the Ottoman Empire. The desire to learn about contemporary events in Greece in order to be able to write about them and draw the attention of public opinion, firstly Italian and then above all English, was a sentiment that had already found a place in Foscolo's *Political State of the Ionian Islands*, drafted before the Lord High Commissioner of Great Britain, Thomas Maitland, issued the Constitution of the islands in 1817 (Giulio 2018: 58). In Foscolo's opinion, Great Britain should have become the political guide of a new European equilibrium and it should have helped the process of self-determination of the peoples, a mission which faded instead, precisely with the conduct promoted in Parga and the Ionian

Islands. Against Maitland's exercise of power over the Heptanese, the exiled poet leveled the harshest criticism, accusing the British commissioner of being responsible for stifling the freedom of self-determination of the Greek peoples of the islands (Sensini 2023: 125-140). A freedom that the Treaty of Paris granted to the Ionian Islands in Article 1, but which is contradicted in Article 4 by which the king is given the final word on the approval of the constitution: on the other hand, Foscolo's denunciation of the permanent presence of British militia to watch over the life of the Heptanese bears witness to precisely to this contradiction (Foscolo 1964: 24).

Furthermore, the link with the Hellenic world clashed, with the now inevitable need to address the English public and relate to British intellectual and political circles, including the *Whigs*, who were directly involved in Foscolo's reflection on the fate of the city (Beltrami 2020: 329-331). In the *Stato politico delle isole ionie*, Foscolo provides his compatriots with a series of general rules and practical advice in view of a new constitution. The poet has an emotional attachment to the Ionian Islands and is confident to return there one day. These elements, together with the cult of the Hellenic tradition, constitute the key of the political history pages he wrote on Greece during his stay in London. The author shows great mastery in identifying the critical aspects of the present political situation and in his ability to propose strategies and measures to deal with the new English 'protector' (Sensini 2020: 15-27). The poet has always nurtured a strong interest in his native land and the islands of its archipelago, an attitude of affectionate solicitude, especially following the numerous institutional vicissitudes to which the islands of the Ionian Sea in particular, formerly the territory of the Venetian Republic, were subjected first during the period of Napoleonic domination and later at the time of the Restoration. But even in this case, his commitment to the independence and freedom of these territories, and thus the need to advocate them to public opinion in his host country, was not always interpreted favorably. Indeed, it seemed to some that his interest was not entirely free from personal gain (Nicoletti 2006: 310). His contribution deals mainly with themes and issues related to the constitutional law that would have been assigned to those

peoples by the British Protectorate. It therefore constitutes a sort of guide for the islanders, who were invited to flee from the riots to avoid repression, but also urged not to take on humiliating manifestations of passive acceptance, showing agreement and unity in order to safeguard their freedom to express their thoughts, to exercise arts and commerce, to dispose of property, to assemble and convey their ideas and positions.

### 3.2. *The analytical structure in open criticism against British protectors*

The first chapter named after the title of the work is presented in six sections. Foscolo describes the condition of the Heptanese in the short period between the Treaty of Paris and the enactment of the constitution by the despotic Maitland in May 1817. In the first section, he frames the geopolitical situation and the difficulties encountered in establishing a new constitutional arrangement (Beltrami 2020: 332-333). The political state

d'una nazione è più o meno *attivo* o *passivo* secondo le forze sue proprie che la nazione può mettere in uso per difendere sé e offendere in guerra gli altri, o aiutarli per via di alleanze. Quanto la nazione è più forte, tant'è necessariamente più attiva; la debolezza costringe all'inazione, e quindi alla dipendenza dall'altrui forza (Foscolo 1964: 5).

The seven Ionian islands do not possess autonomous power for three fundamental reasons:

l'una, l'angustia del lor territorio, e quindi il poco numero di abitanti; l'altra, la distanza e la separazione marittima dall'una all'altra; la terza e la più forte ragione si è che le sono aperte tutte all'invasione di vicini potenti; e Corfù che per le sue fortificazioni opporrebbe grandi difese, non giova a proteggere le altre sei isole, ma bensì ad impicciarle alle guerre (Foscolo 1964: 6).

Foscolo, therefore, is aware that populations with such peculiarities will always find it difficult to declare themselves fully independent and must reckon with the presence of foreign powers with whom they must bargain for dignified protection. On the other hand, the recent Treaty of Paris had left no escape

for the Ionian islands' possible desires for autonomy, even though officially their government could only request the intervention of the British army in the event of an invasion by other external forces<sup>32</sup>. But in addition to the officialdom there are the real conditions: England only looks after its own interests and when they refer to the word protection, they intend the islands to be Loyal to England's interests and so justice also becomes a metaphysical word with no possibility of application.

In the second section, entitled *Gradi probabili della libertà o della oppressione che deriverà dagli inglesi o dagli isolani*, the thinker observes how the failure to implement the treaties established in Paris and concerning the question of effective liberty under the state of protection could lead to internal rebellions, if not even civil wars, returning to conditions prior to the French Revolution. The monarchy is by nature a regime that restricts the freedoms of its subjects, all the more so if they are foreign subjects whose fate has been defined as a result of decisions made by the victors. British officials on the islands are entrusted with the task of controlling the population, fomenting divisions and corruptions by all the means that a classic colonial administration can produce. Revolutions themselves may depend on the will of foreign powers:

e malgrado la *possessione di fatto* che distrugge l'*indipendenza di dritto*, è certo pur sempre che la condotta dei governatori inglesi sarà sempre assai cauta nell'Isole, e non potranno apertamente pigliare i due mezzi necessari all'assoluta oppressione, i quali due mezzi sono i seguenti: l'uno è l'*ignoranza* (Foscolo 1964: 8).

In this sense, Foscolo concretely invites the Greeks to educate themselves and suggests the constitution of an autonomous and advanced school and university system. This topic

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<sup>32</sup> Foscolo writes in point 4 of the sixth section of the *Scritti sulle isole Ionie* concerning the Treaty: «dal *trattato di Parigi* del 5 novembre 1815 appare che le Isole Jonie furono considerate come paesi sui quali tutti gli alleati avevano uguali dritti ed uguale forza di possederle: non si fa motto né cenno che le Isole avessero dritti o meriti all'indipendenza, né facoltà di disporre di se medesime, o di chiedere protezione piuttosto d'uno che d'altro monarca; nessun contratto l'Inghilterra ha fatto con esse: ha bensì fatto dei patti con la Russia, la Prussia e l'Austria; e le Isole furono e sono in istato assolutamente passivo» Foscolo (1964: 23).

occupies the fourth section of the first chapter and the entire second chapter of the treatise entitled *Mémoire sur l'éducation publique aux Isles Ionniennes*. For matters of space, it cannot be analyzed here, but it certainly has considerable pedagogical value. The accusation configured by the Venetian poet is that the positions taken by the English government are fickle and Campbell's conduct is one of simple obedience to the orders of the British Ministry. The poet accuses the British governors of double standards because they try to reduce the population of the islands to a kind of *de facto* colony, while pretending that they want to allow independence. And it is peculiar how in such reasoning, the thinker believes that as a matter of consistency the islanders should avoid 'come la peste politica' feasting, flattery and vile regalia to British protectors. To this end, too, an adequate and autonomous education is necessary, but above all Union, 'lume della verità'.

### 3.2.2. *Freedom does not come because there is no Union*

On the fundamental union between the citizens of the Ionian islands, Foscolo dedicates the entire third section of the first part of the treatise. «Chi conosce i caratteri diversi, i costumi, le animosità municipali e le risse domestiche della maggior parte degli abitanti delle Isole Jonie, non può pensare alla loro concordia politica, e non sentire ad un tempo che il volerla predicare è disperatissima impresa» (Foscolo 1964: 10).

The author is aware of the difficulty he is facing, but tries to find strategic points of popular cohesion that would help the different interests of which the families are bearers. The reasons for the disunity consist in three causes: the political legacy left by the Venetian government; the material and passionate divisions which conditioned the individual relationships between the islanders, that also generated the habit of siding with one or the other foreign power; the parochial prejudices between the inhabitants of the different islands. But the indefatigable poet proposes remedies. In order to gradually overcome the inveterate and flawed Venetian customs, starting in one's own domestic context, every family man must begin to promote messages of loyalty to the unified political project of the Ionian



islands. But a rewriting of the history of the Heptanese in a national sense is necessary on the part of intellectuals, so that citizens can see and identify themselves collectively in it. In this regard, the mission of the ministers of religion, who would have the task of accompanying this patriotic rewriting, is not exempt.

With regard to the second of the causes of disunity, that is the violent quarrels that are passed down between families, change is only possible with new generations who can move away from clan quarrels by respecting two or three shared maxims, such as the centrality of the homeland above personal quarrels, the prohibition of actions aimed at debasing it, or the reasoned disregard for the evil insinuations that could pollute relations between one island and another.

The remedy to the ancient prejudices between the inhabitants of the different islands again involves intellectuals who should have the acumen and patience to study the reasons and provide innovative cures for this social problem. If not well regulated and controlled, the party composition could also contribute to the discord because the same parties composed

di diverse classi d'uomini, come nobili, popolani e plebei, o di persone che professano opinioni diverse fra loro in politica, e sono discordi circa i mezzi più o meno utili a far prosperare la cosa pubblica (Foscolo 1964: 13-14)

can turn into factions and then into sects, contributing to the creation of *stasis*, which has been a political problem for many political thinkers since Antiquity<sup>33</sup>.

#### 4. *The Ionian Constitutional Innovation*

One of the most interesting parts of the first chapter is represented by the fifth paragraph, *Della Costituzione*, through which the author fully enters into the historical dynamics of the time in an attempt to give a decidedly radical direction to European politics of the time. A constitution, in fact, either consolidates around a nucleus of existing and traditionally recognized

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<sup>33</sup> Among others, cf. Aristotle (*Pol.*, V, 1303b 7-17); cf. De Luna (2020: 7-25).

laws, thus following the inductive method determined by consolidated normative experience, as was the case with the Romans, the English and the Swiss, or with a new universal theoretical framework, i.e. following a deductive hypothesis, as in the case of the Jews, the Athenians, the Spartans, the French, the Americans<sup>34</sup>: in this perspective, historical as well as legendary references go from the ancients to the moderns. However, the latter political forms are less durable because for a constitutional structure to be recognized by the community, it must not be at odds with the customs of a population. This was the recipe for success for legislators such as Moses, Lycurgus and Mohammed.

Or applicando le sopraccennate osservazioni all'Isole Jonie, certo è che sarà facilissimo il progettare e discutere una costituzione, e ratificarla e farla accettare dal popolo, ed approvare dalla potenza protettrice; ma il punto sta nell'eseguirla e non mai romperla (Foscolo 1964: 20).

Foscolo identifies four foundations that are indispensable for the constitution to become effective, together with the reason for their existence. According to the first, the state must be federal. The explanation for this first foundation concerns economic and legal management: for Foscolo, the idea of a single ad-

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<sup>34</sup> On the myth of the Gracchi, see Santoro (1988: 307-326). «Gli Americani di cui si è parlato dianzi, quand'incominciarono a voler dar leggi ricorsero all'illustre Locke, ed egli propose loro una costituzione fondata sopra teorie; e fu adottata ed applicata, ma non riuscì. Gli Americani stessi, nella guerra che ebbero con l'Inghilterra, e nelle sciagure da loro provate, e nella necessità di costituirsi in modo d'essere forti, giusti ed indipendenti, stabilirono sopra teorie illuminate dall'esperienza la costituzione che hann'oggi. Pure questa costituzione non durerebbe, se non vi fossero tre cause felici per essa. 1°. Nell'America v'è più terra coltivabile che uomini; quindi ogni individuo può impiegare nella terra o i suoi capitali o il suo lavoro, e quindi divenire indipendente, acquistando nel possedimento di terra coltivata da esso un dritto alla cittadinanza; e questa abbondanza di terra agevola la distribuzione delle proprietà, ed impedisce l'estrema ricchezza da una parte, e l'estrema povertà dall'altra. 2°. In America c'è l'incivilimento senza la corruzione dell'incivilimento europeo. 3°. In America le generazioni vanno crescendo d'anno in anno, in guisa che ogni quindici anni la popolazione si raddoppia di numero; però la costituzione fatta da pochissimi milioni di cittadini, e adottata dai loro bisogni, non può essere trasgredita da quei che nascono in seguito, perché non hanno idee né interessi per altre leggi, e sanno che per esse incominciò a prosperar la patria» Foscolo (1964: 19).

ministrative capital could create problems for a new Ionian government and for the social relations between the islanders, which he had already described as one of the causes of their disunity. According to the second foundation, it is the ownership of land that determines the active citizenship and political rights of the islanders: in this signal departure from the revolutionary doctrinaire approach, reference to the tradition of ancient Greece is evident<sup>35</sup>. Land ownership is constitutionally necessary because the wealth of foodstuffs and the consequent economic income that no other type of business can guarantee depends on it. In this reasoning, Foscolo is even against trade because it is a viaticum of corruption and cowardice and a harbinger of unstable earnings and accumulation, unlike agriculture. Even in this ethical and political critique of the conduct of trade, one can glimpse the typical observations of aristocratic thinkers of antiquity. And here the myth of Lyncurghian Sparta comes to mind, whose citizens were forbidden to trade in goods and possess money (De Martinis 2013: 24-54)<sup>36</sup>. Contextualizing, therefore, Foscolo's writings and actions, this second foundation and the constitutional reasoning in support of it represent an extremely original element of the treatise precisely because more than any other it deliberately sinks its theoretical roots into ancient Greek political thought: the influence of Greek culture on Foscolo's literary production has often been written about, but the impetus of his philosophical-political reflection in this reflection represents a trait of new originality that needs further analysis<sup>37</sup>.

The third foundation consists in the division between judicial and executive power: judges must be elected by all citizens-possessors of land and in the case of internal disputes the municipal militia and not the English army must intervene. However, in order to increase the independent control of the islander people over this constitutional power, the provision of an

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<sup>35</sup> Plato, to give just one example, asserts in the *Laws* the possession of at least one *kleros* as the right of citizenship for new citizens of Magnesia (*Leg.*, V, 739 a-c).

<sup>36</sup> Cf. De Martinis 2013, 24-54.

<sup>37</sup> On the level of literary criticism, see for brevity, for example, the recent Risso (2020: 111-124); Alfonzetti (2020: 171-184); Cosentino (2020: 185-202).

agile and fair civil code in which the jurisdiction of interventions is handed over to the magistrates elected by the people is useful.

The fourth and final cornerstone of the constitution, finally, allows the ministers of religion, both wealthy and secular heads of families, to draft the laws: the islanders would fulfill with greater respect the rules conceived and produced by the priests. It makes no difference whether the future parliament is divided into one or two chambers, the cornerstone of constitutional effectiveness is the 'loyalty' that the institutions must have to the state. A requirement that can be achieved through the use of force. A factor, however, that already leads to a series of anomalies as far as the Ionian Islands are concerned: the magistrates, officials and all administrators who are supposed to enforce the laws even by force are subservient to the British government that holds the military force. The bottom line is that any constitutional architecture promoted is ineffective as long as the Ionian Islands remain British colonies.

#### 4.1 *Necessary Changes*

Once the constitution had been issued by Maitland, Foscolo nevertheless wanted to deal with it by adding to the essay he had already written on the Ionian Islands a corollary entitled *Come ottenere modifiche alla Costituzione delle Isole Ionie*, in which he reasoned about the ways to oppose certain liberticidal aspects of the constitutional charter in order to possibly obtain its abrogation or at least its modification<sup>38</sup>. Indeed, the Venetian poet called on the islanders to review the constitution ratified by their deputies because they were corrupted or otherwise conditioned by the absolute authorities of the English crown. The eleven deputies of the Primary Council appointed directly by the High Commissioner for the Ionian Islands, in fact, were not legitimized by any democratic election and therefore represented only a stage fiction concocted by Maitland himself.

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<sup>38</sup> See Beltrami (2020: 331-332). These are 43 short paragraphs preserved among the Foscolo manuscripts in the Biblioteca Labronica in Livorno. Cf. Giulio (2018: 58).

Di poi offrì a' Comizi settinsulari una doppia lista di ventinove nomi vili ed abbiotti, e in tal guisa volle far apparire che i Comizi abbiano eletto i loro legislatori; questi ventinove uniti agli altri undici formarono l'Assemblea legislativa (Foscolo 1964: 28).

It must be a new figure, one or more ionian agents, to communicate with the British government on matters affecting the islands' territories. The poet is aware both of the fact that this proposal is the *extrema ratio* for establishing an independent guarantor for the islands and of the reluctance of British ministers. He proposes three means for its approval. The first, for which he already foresees legal opposition from Maitland, is a new Ionian parliament elected by the people in their own right and flanked by one or more ion agents recognized by the king. From London, the agent who will directly initiate complaints to be made on behalf of the island communities to the British monarch without the intercession of the High Commissioner. The second means involves the recognition of the islands' agent through the contracting states. In Foscolo's eyes, the other powers are also complicit in the British desire to restrict the autonomy to which the Ionian Islands are entitled. The exiled poet refers to the diplomatic route that Russia could have taken to invite the king of England to strictly respect the spirit of the treaty and the decisions on the Ionian Islands that flow from it. And he also invites the other European powers to follow the Russian example so that it does not remain an isolated case. The main basis of Russia's note

dovrebbe consistere nel motivo "che avendo il Maitland deputato per agente delle Isole in Londra un suddito britannico, e ciò essendo contro ogni ragione e principio di politica e di diritto delle genti, la Russia esige che l'agente sia nativo delle Isole ed eletto senza l'intervenzione del Lord Alto Commissario, contro del quale si hanno necessariamente e ora e per l'avvenire da produrre i riclami del paese protetto - stando quindi nella dignità, nella giustizia e nella saviezza del Re d'Inghilterra il diritto ed i mezzi di conoscere il vero, e pronunziare giudizio su la validità de' riclami e su la lite tra il Commissario e gl'Isolani" (Foscolo 1964: 31).

Even Russia alone could suffice to guarantee the rules laid down in Paris, but the evaluation of the effects is not a foregone conclusion. The latter proposal turns out to be the third means for the recognition of the agent of the Ionian Islands in England. Relations between the tsarist empire and the English crown had always been good and Foscolo saw the possibility that a cooling of these diplomatic relations could also jeopardize the plots, which the Venetian thinker called secrets, existing between the interests of the two states. However, the British government also feared internal political retaliation: the British parliamentary opposition, in fact, could have taken advantage of the difficulties in foreign policy to attack the government. Therefore, the opposition party could have made the Ionian demands its own and it could have supported a potential action of Russia in that direction in the very Chambers. In any case, the advantages for Emperor Alexander of Russia would have been considerable.

### *Conclusions*

The whole of Greece, after tormented centuries of Ottoman occupation, began to revolt against the Turks from 1821 onwards, thus, at the same time as Foscolo's writings (Delli Quadri 2023: 37-57). The insurrection flared up all over Greece and the Ottomans bloodily suppressed the independence attempts: among the bloodiest facts, one may recall the massacre on the island of Chios in 1822. These facts raised a wide echo in liberal circles all over Europe. Russia too, with the succession to the throne of Nicholas I, worked for Greek independence with the ambition of obtaining an outlet to the Mediterranean. The native revolutionaries conducted offensives from the north and from the sea. In 1827, the year of Ugo Foscolo's death, France, England and Russia opened hostilities by annihilating the Turkish fleet. The end of the war and the autonomy of Greece were established under the protectorate of France, Great Britain and Russia. The revolutionaries had given themselves a republican order under the presidency of Johannes Capodistrias, who was assassinated in 1831 also because of a policy considered authoritarian and pro-Russian (Beltrami 2020: 330). The

episode was the pretext for the protecting powers to interfere in Greek politics and impose the monarchy.

In the years leading up to this historical epilogue, the *Scritti sullo Stato politico delle Isole Ionie* brought to the surface one of the most problematic ideological nodes of the Restoration: the clash between the colonial policy of the great European diplomacies and the national projects of independence of the small countries still subjugated to foreign domination. The poet championed the demands of the Heptanese and in his capacity he drew the historical and political lines for the federal constitution of the United States of the Ionian Islands. Radical reflections condensed into a short treatise that rather resembles a denunciation made after the recent post-revolutionary disappointments, nevertheless striking for its analytical lucidity and for some references to the topicality of ancient Hellenic thought that inexorably ties in with modern Greek history. Foscolo's historical and philosophical research seems to have the aim of identifying a new doctrinal nucleus capable of responding to the new European political developments following the Restoration, but without abandoning the radical spirit that had marked the author's training and action before 1815. In this climate, Foscolo seems to present himself in the garb of the ancient legislator, head in exile. In addition to the list of *desiderata* that were impossible to realize, also due to the rapidity of the political changes taking place, he was able to grasp the historical and psychological aspects that characterized the life of the island communities. The considerations on the citizenship that Foscolo's constitution ensured to landowning citizens and his aversion to commerce refer to ancient fascinations that Foscolo did not shy away from and represent an originality that obliges us to new considerations and above all new studies. The draft of the *Scritti sulle Isole Ionie* that Foscolo probably planned to expand and strengthen was not distributed and the independence project also began to proceed more slowly.

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*Abstract*

THE CONSTITUTIONAL VIEW OF FOSCOLO IN *SCRITTI SULLE ISOLE IONIE*

*Keywords:* Foscolo, Parga, Heptanese, constitutional theory, British Empire.

Among Ugo Foscolo's numerous works, the political ones represent an object of investigation for which an interdisciplinary reading is necessary. This is particularly true for the *Scritti sullo Stato politico delle isole Ionie*, which anticipate by a few years *Narrative of events illustrating the Fortunes ad cession of Parga*, both of which have not been officially published, but which deliver to the contemporary reader the weight of the Venetian poet's political reflections and activism with respect to the events that took place in his beloved home territories. The contribution is intended as a brief guide to the historical events that affected the western area of Greece through the annotations in the two texts, the first of which also testifies to a Foscolian constitutional theory with original elements drawn from ancient political thought.

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