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The Greek mirror: philhellenism and southern Italian patriotisms (1750–1861)

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Abstract

In the last few decades many studies have underlined the role of philhellenism in shaping the Risorgimento as a transnational movement. But philhellenism also had a significant impact in embodying the pre-unification Italian state in a new imaginative framework, marked by the binary oppositions of civilized/barbarian, liberal/despotic and north/south. This article analyses the influence of philhellenism in shaping the imagery of the Kingdom of Sardinia in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the role played by this local imagery in promoting opposing patriotisms within the national political sphere in the years leading up to the unification of Italy. Cavour's moderate party stressed the positive impact of the Piedmontese domination over the island of Sardinia in order to underline Piedmont's image as a force of modernization of a land strongly marked by feudal despotism and pastoral violence. By contrast, Mazzini and the democrats also deployed a philhellenic narrative scheme to explain the backwardness of Sardinia with reference to the despotic and 'oriental' character of the Piedmontese domination in an attempt to encourage opposition to unification under the leadership of the subalpine government.

Keywords

Philhellenism, Risorgimento, patriotism, Greek diaspora, Kingdom of Sardinia, Italy.

Introduction

In August 1860, Giuseppe Mazzini asked the democratic subalpine parliamentary deputy Giorgio Asproni to send him notes and historic documents relating to Sardinia. The timing was critical: Garibaldi had just announced his intention to cede the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies to Vittorio Emanuele II, and plebiscites were being organized in Naples and Palermo to legitimize annexation to the Kingdom of Sardinia. The democratic dream of making Garibaldi's dictatorship the basis for the creation of a great republican state was in its twilight. At this critical moment and in his attempts to prevent this outcome, Mazzini wanted to bring the example of Sardinia to the attention of Italians. The island had been subject to the Piedmontese 'yoke' since 1720 and it was for this reason, Mazzini would claim, that the condition of the island was

abject. Not only had the Piedmontese done nothing to improve the situation, but they had made conditions worse by reducing the island to a state of scandalous subordination. Mazzini believed, therefore, that Sardinia served as a warning to those Sicilians and Neapolitans who favored merging with the Kingdom of Sardinia and placed their hopes for moral and economic resurgence in Cavour's Piedmont. As had already been evident in Sardinia, and as was to happen in the rest of the south after unification, the Piedmontese would reveal themselves as despotic and unpopular rulers. Their style of governing would fall back on the same barbarities and incivilities associated with the hated Bourbons; they would use military force, siege tactics and violence to impose their laws as they had already done in Sardinia (Mazzini 1995).

Mazzini wrote, but it was Giorgio Asproni who dictated. The Sardinian drew frequently on the stereotypes around which Sardinia's negative image had developed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and in doing so he adapted to this local context many of the narrative tropes that originated in the discourses of the philhellenic movement. For philhellenists, the backwardness of Greece was simply a consequence of the Turkish despotism to which the Greeks had been subject for centuries. But the same formula could easily be applied to explain the decline of both Italy and Sardinia, both being seen as consequences respectively of previous Spanish and more recent Austrian and Bourbon despotic government, and not of the climatic determinism popularized by Montesquieu in the eighteenth century. Dismantling the negative heritage of the past thus became the legitimate route to the redemption to which Sardinians (like the Italians) felt they had the right.

Since the eighteenth century, a handful of native Sardinian administrators had been working to achieve this 'regeneration', in close collaboration with the Savoyard state and in ways that were very similar to the parallel experiences of enlightened reformism in Naples and Sicily. Nineteenth-century Sardinian intellectuals closely studied the first results of the eighteenth century reform initiatives and supported the subalpine state attempts to transform the economic and institutional framework of their own island, and especially the colonization plans that the House of Savoy had adopted in an attempt to repopulate Sardinia. But they concluded that the outcome of this demographic program had fallen far short of expectations through no fault of the monarchy but because of moral and social disorder that were products of the feudalism and violence that had dominated during the long period of Spanish domination.

The story of a Greek colony that was established at San Cristoforo Montresta during the 1850s often cited as an example. Nineteenth-century historians claimed that the foundation of the Greek colony triggered the opposition of feudal despotism and the barbaric ferocity of the shepherds, revealing the 'oriental' character of Sardinian society that was dominated by forces hostile to progress, civilization and modern freedom. It has recently been demonstrated, however, that the version of the Montresta saga created by Sardinian-Piedmontese intellectuals was a romantic invention that formed part of a wider

transnational representation of ‘Southernization’ in the cases of Sardinia and the Two Sicilies (Salice 2012).

Starting from the invention of the dark legend of Montresta, this article will first analyze how the philhellenic discourse worked to create negative images of Sardinia. It will then show how during the nineteenth century these local images moved from the conservative and moderate camp to the democratic and republican movement, and how a predominantly local debate became a national one in the weeks leading up to the creation of the Kingdom of Italy. These shifts reveal the strong interdependence between the invention of the local homeland and national imagery, between the sense of southern and Italian otherness. It also illustrates how the same imagery served to activate patriotisms of a completely different and even contradictory nature. These themes have recently been the object of numerous studies, from the now classic studies by Anderson (1996) and Hobsbawm and Ranger (2002) to those of Alberto Mario Banti (2000) and the cultural approaches to the history of the Risorgimento. While Nelson Moe (2002) studied the contribution of foreign opinion (Eurocentric and southern minded) in shaping images of Italy, Maurizio Isabella (2011) has instead turned the spotlight on the role played by Italian exiles in the structuring of transnational images of Italy. For Silvana Patriarca (2010), the interaction between internal and international public opinion was the incubator for the common features that created Italian diversity (see also Janz and Riall 2014).

This representation was superimposed on reality, through books, theater and popular magazines, which spread even as far as secondary social and peripheral spaces, managing to contaminate languages and rituals of completely different antiquities and meaning (Riall 2010). To sum up, the creation of an imagery around Italy was a multidirectional and diachronic process (Verga 2011, 2013), capable of activating patriotism of different kinds (Meriggi 2014), both in large proto-industrial cities and in small regional capitals. But it also penetrated the ranks of the ruling groups in the country, even those still in the balance between legality and rebellion (Pinto 2010), between the code of the vendetta and national justice (Salice 2011).

On the Italian horizon, the relationship between Piedmont and Sardinia moved ahead because, as Franco Venturi (1865) noted, it was within that relationship that for the first time the Piedmontese judicial culture impacted on a social area that had Mediterranean and ‘Spanish’ features; and it was on the basis of this experience that an important component of the ruling class that played a role in the unification process of Italy. Salvatore Pes di Villamarina, who had served first as the Sardinian ambassador to Paris and Florence and then as Cavour’s plenipotentiary to Naples since 1860, is one of the most striking examples.

Villamarina was the heir to a prestigious historical family whose hereditary and genealogical roots lay in the island’s agro-pastoral economy and who had flourished in the shadow of the throne of Savoy (Mele 1994). Pes di Villamarina was a major exponent of the moderate ruling group which formulated a vision of southern Italy for Cavour (Moe 2002, 158) and contributed in a decisive way to

the start of the ‘Piedmontization’ of the national movement, driven by the belief that the state in the name of which he was operating could offer to the people of the Two Sicilies benefits similar to those enjoyed by Sardinia. It was precisely to fight against this idea of Piedmont as a force for progress and civilization that the democrats employed the negative imagery of Sardinia to demonstrate the colonial, despotic and ‘oriental’ character of the Kingdom ruled by Cavour.

A philhellenic media structure

In 1836 the soldier-scientist Alberto Ferrero della Marmora visited the village of Montresta which had been founded some eighty years earlier by the Greeks (Casana Testore 1997; Ricuperati 1986). The Greek-Sardinian Dimas Passarò, one of the few descendants of the colonists who had founded the village, welcomed the illustrious visitor from Piedmont. During the visit Della Marmora learned that Montresta had been destroyed by Sardinian shepherds from the royal city of Bosa and the inhabitants slaughtered. Della Marmora told this story to the historian Vittorio Angius, one of the most active subalpine intellectuals of the nineteenth century, who included it in the entries about Sardinia that he compiled for the Piedmontese Goffredo Casalis’s *Dizionario storico-statistico* (1839, 691). In 1860, it was the same Della Marmora who confirmed the tragic fate of the Greeks ‘all killed little by little, and those who did not die de balla (shot), as they say on the island, died de Deus, massacred by the unhealthy air typical of those places’ (Della Marmora 1999a, 261). Thus, the black legend of Montresta spread well beyond the borders of Sardinia: Semeria (1831, 150) and Neigebaur (1855) provided accounts based on that written by Giuseppe Manno, while the Frenchman Despine (1881) gave precedence to Della Marmora. Raffaele Ciasca (1933) was among the first twentieth-century historians to confirm the massacre of the Greeks by the Bosa shepherds, although Giulio Piroddi (1967) tried instead to deny it, since the parish records show that only one Greek was killed by a Sardinian bullet. But it is Della Marmora’s version of events that has stood the test of time, giving to us, along with the seal of academic historiography, the oral memory that flourished in the nineteenth century in the dialogues between the villagers of Montresta, the citizens of Bosa and state officials.

This romantic myth contaminated the state archives up to April 1830, when Giovanni Pinna, the prefect of Cuglieri-Bosa, writing to the Viceroy of Sardinia, recalled the ‘epoch of the Greeks who lived in the village [of Montresta]’ and underlined that ‘the bravest and youngest among the Greeks, whose national pride was hurt, and who perhaps foresaw their own destiny, returned to their own classic soil’ (Cagliari State Archives [ASCA], Segreteria di Stato, II series, vol. 1626). In reality, the ‘courageous young men’ to whom the prefect referred had never returned to Greece; some of them had in fact never left Sardinia. The words of the prefect were conditioned by the literary tropes of the time and the emotions aroused by Greece’s recent independence, a passion for the Greek

Renaissance which, even in the Sardinian states, was ‘financial’, motivated by commercial reasons, as D’Annunzio was to say (Di Benedetto 1999), but whose success was due to the presence of a public fascinated by the modern and progressive symbolism that the Greek struggle had assumed in their eyes.¹

In the Montresta legend, which was modified to fit the local situation, the theme of the Greek myth of Parga came alive. Parga was the Greek village that in 1819 the British had ceded to the Ottoman Governor Alì Pascia (Urbani 2004), thus enraging Ugo Foscolo (1819) and Giovanni Berchet (1848). The two poet-prophets (and numerous other intellectuals, such as Pouqueville [1820]) had depicted this cession, though negligible on a diplomatic scale, as a grave British error of judgment which had thrown the Greeks of Parga into the hands of the violent Ottoman tyrant. There followed a scandal of international proportions and a strengthening of the philhellenic ideology that had inspired the elites of the Old World since the second half of the eighteenth century (Di Benedetto 1999). The massacre at Chio in 1822, in which the Turks bloodily put down the first great Greek uprising, provided Claude Fauriel with the inspiration for his *Chants populaires de la Grèce moderne* (1824), an implicit legitimization of the Greek aspirations to independence. On the Italian side it was the *Antologia* that spread philhellenic values and rights between 1821 and 1828. The Florentine journal founded by Gian Pietro Vieusseux extolled the Greek capacity to preserve its own ‘national character’ notwithstanding ‘four centuries’ of Ottoman ‘barbarian despotism’, and he offered it as a model of patriotic virtue to his readers (Bertoncini 2004, 5).

There was no shortage of *ultra* reactions to the liberal philhellenism of the *Antologia*: the *Amico d’Italia* (1822–29), the voice of Piedmontese clerical legitimacy, accused the Tuscan magazine of propagating ‘false and damaging’ images (Romeo 2012, 209). But the attack unleashed a reaction even among important conservative sectors, demonstrating that the appreciation of the work carried out by *Antologia* was shared across political and social interests. In 1833, Giuseppe Manno, who was already an influential figure in the Savoyard state, in his letter ‘Sull’abolizione delle tasse annonarie del Piemonte’, boasted to Vieusseux that he had been ‘one of the first to applaud the useful distinction by which your Anthology now contains in each issue a series of concise news items, that clarify the state and progress of everything belonging to the arts, to industry, to business and the public economy of the various provinces of Italy’ (*Annali universali di statistica, economia pubblica, storia, viaggi e commercio* 1833, 167).

Manno understood that the *Antologia* gave ‘national’ form and content to its public. By hosting the production (literary, historic and statistical) of and about all the Italian ‘homelands’, the journal wove together a network of writers and readers who traveled across the boundaries between the Italian states and who knew the principal Italian cities but also the islands and outlying areas. There was no shortage of studies on Sardinia: in 1825 the magazine commented on the highly influential *Storia di Sardegna* by the same Manno, while in 1826 it reviewed the *Voyage en Sardaigne* by Alberto della Marmora. For the first time

ever, the two works thus established a new and dynamic rapport between the history of the Sardinian and the Italian homelands, making its recent discovery accessible to a wide section of the public and attracting attention far beyond the narrow circles of the Savoy administration that had actually promoted the study (Grendi 1996, 39).

The beneficiaries of these publications were not only government circles, of which the same Manno was a spokesman, but also a close-knit line-up of young liberals, many of whom were convinced that Italy, like Greece, could redeem itself through popular uprisings (Rogari 2011). The Sassari aristocrat Efsio Tola, brother of the historian Pasquale, not only believed in this but went so far as to join Mazzini's *Giovine Italia* and align himself with the philhellenes Santorre di Santarosa, Alberto della Marmora and other young Piedmontese officials who had joined the 1821 nationalist conspiracy in Turin. Tola paid for his patriotic ardor with his life, which earned him a place in the pantheon of Italian martyrs (D'Amato 1851). The Greek example also inspired young men who, for family reasons, idealistic convictions or convenience, refused revolutionary methods and rhetoric (Liakos 1995). Between 1827 and 1828, the foreign page of the government-controlled *Giornale di Cagliari* updated its readers on the Greek situation with highly detailed reports on Greek–Turkish clashes. The editors could not openly support either side, but in September 1828 their enthusiasm was uncontainable as they announced the imminent publication in the *Antologia* of the Italian translation of several poems by Lord Byron.² The Cagliari journal edited by Stanislao Caboni previewed several lines that, as the article put it, 'Byron puts in the mouth of a Greek at a banquet' (*Giornale di Cagliari*, August 1828). The journal judged the verses to be 'extremely happy and sound' and the editorial staff declared themselves anxious to see the English poet's work in its entirety 'presented in its Italian form'.

In the following years, support for philhellenism was increasingly evident in subalpine literary and periodical production. The Oristano canon Salvator Angelo De Castro, future deputy to the subalpine left, dedicated a great deal of space to modern popular Greek songs in the pre-1848 liberal-leaning journal *La Meteora*. Following one of the main themes of European philhellenism, De Castro considered that Modern Greek poetry showed that what was noble and civilized among the ancient Greeks was still thriving among their contemporary descendants. The Greeks had known how to preserve these qualities during the centuries in which the 'voracious Ottomans' had cast Greece into 'an abyss of wretchedness', from which 'the beautiful days of freedom disappeared and there came instead those of slavery' (*La Meteora*, 31 May 1843). These had been dark centuries, continued De Castro, during which 'every restraint of law' vanished, 'covenants were violated, churches turned into mosques, the inhabitants of Parga were forced to flee their native soil in misery, every right was trampled upon, and full reign was given to the lust for oppression' (ibid.). The themes and images that Foscolo and Berchet had used to inspire Italy and Italians to seek their redemption were turned by De Castro on

Sardinia and the Sardinians, and not through some subversive publication but in the columns of a newspaper permitted by the organs of state censorship.

Even the monarchist Vittorio Angius gave his blessing to the young men who came from all over Europe to support Greece in its struggle to ‘liberate itself from slavery under the Ottomans’ (1853, 79). These volunteers, Gilles Pécourt (2004) has argued, made a decisive contribution to giving the Risorgimento a transnational dimension and among them was the nobleman Silverio Broglia di Casalborgone who fought and died on the battlefield. Philhellenism left its mark even on Giovanni Siotto-Pintor’s *Storia letteraria di Sardegna*, probably the most widely read work in nineteenth-century Sardinian literature. According to Siotto-Pintor, the poem entitled ‘la Profuga di Nora’, by Pietro Martini, was a ‘delightful imitation of the *Profughi di Parga* by Giovanni Berchet’ (1844, 252).³

The fact that the Cagliari historian Pietro Martini felt sympathy for the Greek Risorgimento is confirmed by his *Studj storico-politici sulle libertà moderne d’Europa dal 1789 al 1852* (1854), in which the battle of the Greeks to ‘recover the freedom and independence stolen by the Turks’ was presented as the ‘only tempering of the pain of growing oppression’. According to Martini (1854, 115), the Greek nation, although ‘for centuries under the cruel iron rod of Islamism ... kept alive hopes of redemption ... kept pure the sense of nationality, and remained united through the bonds of religion, language, ideas and emotions’.

Thus, the main Sardinian intellectuals of the nineteenth century assimilated the philhellenic lesson and, thanks to newspapers, historical essays and poems, embodied a collective action that spread through the ranks of the Sardinian bourgeoisie and became adapted to the local political framework. As the Greeks were rescued thanks to the rediscovery of their history, language, traditions and folk poetry, so the Sardinians would have “to regenerate themselves in the same way,” in order to legitimize their political aspirations and reject any deterministic reading of their delay, which was instead a legacy of bad governments of the past.

Monarchical philhellenism

Philhellenism proved to be an extraordinarily useful set of concepts for the pro-Savoy intellectuals who wanted to write a history of Sardinia that exonerated the monarchy of any responsibility for the island’s backwardness. Their indignation was directed at the feudal landowners and shepherds and hence at the whole legacy of Spanish rule. Giuseppe Manno (1840, 305), for example, argued that feudalism had compromised the colonization policies, while Alberto Della Marmora (1999a, 261) blamed the feudal nobility for generating the ‘hatred for the property of others and [of] that insatiable thirst for territory that characterized the class of Sardinian shepherds’ and which had caused them at Montresta to ‘look with evil intent at the new arrivals’.

To the shepherds, the Piedmontese writer argued, ‘could be added the inhabitants and the rich landowners of nearby Bosa’ who were also motivated by

racial hatred and ‘protested at the settlement by foreigners of what they called their territory’ (Della Marmora 1999b, 261). Even Vittorio Angius (Casalis 1841, 757) blamed the shepherds both for the destruction of the Greek colony and for the failure of the government’s plans for agricultural colonization of the island, a subject that was close to the heart of the abbot from Cagliari, as is evident from the frequency of his speeches on the subject in the subalpine parliament (Anedda 1969).

Shepherds and landowners were the obsessive targets of these intellectuals, who made them the key figures in the imagery of the island. This led to the paradoxical outcome of confirming the foreigner prejudices regarding the island, and at the same time insisting that to change this situation a closer study of the island’s history, geography and society was needed. But the ‘bourgeois’ attack on the Old Regime also revealed the hopes that animated the intelligentsia, who were right to conclude that the shepherds denied any form of individual property rights while the feudal landowner symbolized man’s domination over man. Their expectation was that the state alone could initiate reforms to resolve these problems.

In so doing, the state would show to the world that the backwardness of Sardinia was neither natural nor inevitable, but instead the consequence of misjudged political decisions taken by corrupt and corrupting regimes in the past, that is, by conditions that could be changed through reform. Nor was this a question of generic reform but of a plan of action promoted by the Sardinian government and the Savoy monarchy. Here, the determinist arguments used by many foreigners to explain the backwardness of Southern Europe were ‘returned to sender’, making the individual and collective will a historical driving force and the Savoy monarchy a tool for redemption and civilization.

Similar support for state intervention on the part of intellectuals has often been judged too harshly, even by historians. The horrified denunciations of the shepherds reflected real issues, as can be seen from the tens of thousands of archival documents that record cases of land occupations, the devastation of cultivated fields, pitched battles and murders.⁴

However, those same documents also tell us that the social space that was the protagonist of these social and economic conflicts was never as neatly divided as nineteenth-century historians claimed, between shepherds and landowners on the one hand, and farmers and the bourgeoisie on the other. The rural world was rather an archipelago of mixed economies. The shepherd was almost always farmer as well, and the great landowners were often attentive to profit and not just to rents, while because the middle class often aspired to acquire in order to promote its entry into the nobility. A narrative based on the contrasts between civilization/barbarity, farmer/shepherd and individual/collective ownership therefore needs to be added to the politically colored picture that inspired nineteenth-century pro-monarchist historians.

However, the ‘tragedy’ of the Greeks of Montresta was a microcosm that served to demonstrate the destructive nature of feudalism and pastoralism and

pointed the way to redemption. As long as Montresta suffered the oppression of the burghers of Bosa, Angius wrote, ‘agriculture could not flourish’, but when ‘this harassment ceased with the abolition of feudalism’ and ‘the boldness of the shepherds’ subsided, the Montrestini were finally able to focus on their own affairs and be ‘less miserable, than they have been previously’ (Casalis 1839, 691). Just as the Greeks had to free themselves from the heritage of the Ottoman Empire to rise once more, so Montresta would come back to life once Sardinians succeeded in overcoming the negative legacy of feudalism.

So Montresta became the mirror that reflected the values and priorities of the elites who were engaged in legitimizing Savoy reforms. They considered themselves to be a handful of men who incited others to modernity, to respect for established power, to the pursuit of public happiness. Their world was divided into two halves, one occupied by barbarism and despotism, the other inhabited by martyrs for progress, saints for liberty and heroes of civilization.

The homeland was thus revealed to the Sardinians and the world as being dramatically suspended between these two forces, but fortunately entrusted – and this was the positive message – to a monarchy that was rationalizing the administrative apparatuses, centralizing justice and controlling the regions. Thus, it was not simply a case of presenting Sardinia’s history, its physical and social geography, but of emphasizing the organic and progressive links with the Piedmontese monarchy.

The ‘orientalization’ of Piedmont

As Marina Formica (2012) has shown, the representation of the Greeks as the incarnation of the values of European civilization and of the Turks as a symbol of despotism and barbarism runs through Western culture from the early modern period. It is a narrative device that goes from Aristotle through Albert the Great, Dante, Thomas Aquinas and Marsilius of Padova up to Machiavelli, one of the most widely read authors by the patriots of the Risorgimento (Scichilone 2002). It was Machiavelli who incorporated the lessons of Aristotle in his own innovative political message when he compared the French monarchy, a model of the modern ‘European’ state, with the ‘Monarchy of the Turks’, a remake of Persian despotism.

From the Humanists onwards, the contrasting of civilization/barbarism and freedom/despotism, when applied to the Eastern/Western binomial, thus inspires theories on liberty, whether that of the aristocratic type that powered the English revolutions, or the eighteenth-century republican and bourgeois versions.

The circulation of books and the widespread dissemination of the ‘popular’ press and theater transformed similar discursive models into a common European sentiment that resurfaced in particularly virulent form in European philhellenism in the aftermath of the first anti-Ottoman revolts in Greece. These were tax revolts that Western Europeans invested with old anti-Turkish reflexes

and new political and moral meanings. The fiscal resistance of the Greeks was in this way transformed into a battle for the restoration of ancient lost liberties and redemption from centuries of foreign domination.

The impact of this tremendous ‘media’ operation on nineteenth-century Italy convinced almost all the leading protagonists of the Risorgimento – Mazzini, Cavour, Crispi, Garibaldi and Vittorio Emanuele II – to support the philhellenic project (Ghidetti 1994, 292). All of Italy and its struggle for liberation was mirrored in Greece. But woven around the philhellenic sentiments there were also strands of local, regional and pre-unification patriotisms: as the Greeks were for the philhellenes, so the Sardinians were for the pro-Savoy intellectuals, who as we have seen insisted that material backwardness and moral poverty were the result of centuries of bad government. The accusation was leveled, of course, at all the island’s former dominators, but above all the Spanish, whose feudal despotism most closely resembled that of the Turks.

It was not just the conservative and moderate intellectuals who made use of this interpretation, which also found support in the democratic camp, as the career of Gavino Fara illustrates. Fara was a prominent and well-respected lawyer from Cagliari, a lively polemicist, the founder of fiercely anti-Cavour periodicals and several times elected to the Subalpine Chamber. While he was still a young student, Fara fell in love with the patriotic poems of Giovanni Berchet, learning them by memory to avoid being discovered with the written versions on his person (Rossi-Fara 1896, 12). Those readings led him in adulthood to express through the philhellenic canon his opposition to the government of Cavour and Piedmont in the columns of his newspaper *Il Popolo*.

Later, Fara adapted this same rhetorical frame to fit the political situation after the revolutions of 1848. During the brief period when Rome had been a democratic republic, Fara called on his compatriots to engage in a ‘holy war, a war of redemption, a war of the People’, damning any ‘Italian who does not burn with righteous fury ... against the barbarian and all those with him’. All patriots had to mobilize and ‘assault the enemy who deflowers our virgins, kills our old people and young girls, profanes the temple of God, deserts the country and sacks the cities’ (*Il Popolo*, 5 March 1849). Austria became the ‘Turks’ for the Italians, from whom they had assumed the same barbarian and anti-Christian characteristics, since they were the imperial power that, along with Spain, had destroyed Italian freedom (Francia 2013).

Once the first War of Independence was over, Piedmont was once again the primary polemical target of the democrats, who sought to ‘orientalize’ its image and hence attribute to it characteristics that were unworthy of a genuinely European country. The Neapolitan democrat Carlo Pisacane, for example, stated that ‘the domination by the House of Savoy and the domination by the House of Austria are one and the same thing’ and that the ‘constitutional regime of Piedmont is more harmful to Italy than the tyranny of Ferdinando II’ (Smith 2010, 315–316).

Giorgio Asproni, one of the most influential of the subalpine democratic deputies, compared the ‘wicked domination’ of the Piedmontese with the Turks who had oppressed Greece and with the Bourbons who had enslaved the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, on account of ‘the ruthless government that they have inflicted, are inflicting and will inflict upon Sardinia’ (Asproni 1976, 49).

The attacks on the ways in which Cavour and Piedmont had been responsible for the internal colonization of the island touched directly on themes of major importance for the subalpine ruling class that would become even more critical after unification (Gallo 2012). The federalist deputy Giovan Battista Tuveri claimed, for example, that while Cavour could have conceded the lands of the state ‘on the same terms that America gave its land to those who wished to improve it ... he chose instead to give it away to a few in order to destroy the populated areas and reduce them to vast tracts and miserable lands’ (*La Gazzetta Popolare*, 11 January 1860). To this, Asproni added that the Piedmontese ‘blatantly oppose the colonization [of Sardinia], because they want it to be permanently depopulated, barbarian and a slave’ (Asproni 1974, 307).

It was not just the conduct of Piedmont in Sardinia that acted as a new setting for the eternal struggle between despotism (Eastern) and freedom (Western). During the decade in which the Kingdom of Sardinia prepared to assume the leadership of the movement for Italian unification, the accusation that the moderates were supporting a government that was founded on the violent and illegal usurpation of power came also from the ultra-Catholics who fought against the Rattazzi law, aimed at suppression of religious communities, and accused Cavour’s government of being a tyrannical power that wanted to ‘enslave our religion, our country, our freedom’ (Anonymous 1855). But it was the democratic critique of the relationship between Piedmont and its first real south, Sardinia, which formed the nucleus of a discursive system that combined with the narrative structures of philhellenic origin and soon demonstrated its capacity to go beyond the boundaries of the internal political and electoral competition within the State of Sardinia.

The landing by Garibaldi in Sicily in the late spring of 1860 completely transformed the national political scene and, as Nelson Moe (1992) wrote, it inaugurated a season that would be decisive in terms of creating a new cultural hierarchy between the Italy of the north and that of the south. It was precisely at that moment that the negative image of Sardinia was called upon to play a role in terms of defining the diverse and competing forms of patriotism.

On the eve of the plebiscites that legitimized the annexation of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies to the Kingdom of Sardinia and marked the peak of Cavour’s political success, the republicans were urgently drawing attention to the abuses suffered by the Sardinian islanders. The time has come, wrote Asproni, ‘to highlight the royal nature and sad government of the Piedmontese’. The purpose was to inform the public that the extension of the Piedmontese system of government to Sicily and Naples would produce the same disastrous effects already evident in Sardinia. ‘This annexation [of the Two Sicilies]’,

Asproni wrote in his *Political Diary* in October 1860, 'will bring us to civil war', since it is not 'possible for Napoli to suffer the yoke of Torino, and for Southern Italy to bear the insolence of the Piedmontese' (Asproni 1976, 555).

Asproni wrote these prophetic words at the end of days filled with constant meetings with Mazzini, Crispi, Federico Campanella and Aurelio Saffi, to discuss, among other things, 'above and beyond Piedmontese influence in Italy'. It was as an aside during one of these lively conversations on 14 October, that Mazzini asked Asproni to provide him with the notes on the history of the subalpine domination of the island that the Sardinian had written in reply to Manno, La Marmora and the other moderate intellectuals that we encountered in the first part of this article. At the same meeting, Carlo Cattaneo even confided his opinions about the Piedmontese to Asproni, remarking that 'Italy should cede Piedmont to France and separate it from us with a Chinese Wall' (Asproni 1976, 554). An oriental wall, to isolate the state that federalists like Ferrari would not have hesitated to describe as barbarian, that in 1848 they were about to invade and annex the whole of Italy (Smith 2010, 305).

Precisely in order to avert the danger of a new barbarian invasion, both Cattaneo and Mazzini wanted to study the Sardinian case. On 17 October, Mazzini again requested Asproni's historical notes; Asproni gave them to him the next day. As historians have noted, Mazzini's articles based on his reading of these notes were directed at reiterating a sense of Sardinia being a part of the Italian identity, and preventing a possible cession to France.

However, when Mazzini asked for and obtained the notes, what the republican leader wanted was objective evidence of the despotic, anti-popular and anti-national character of Piedmontese rule in Sardinia. In other words, he wanted to 'orientalize' Piedmont, comparing it to the Central European empires that had held the nations of the Balkans in a state of submission for centuries. So while the south was being reshaped as an ideological and moralistic creation, democrats were also denouncing the despotic nature of Piedmontese rule on the island of Sardinia, which since 1720 had been treated as a colony, offering tangible proof that the Piedmontese had not come to the south to ensure moral and civil progress for Italians.

Before addressing the moderates, the anti-Piedmontist republicans spoke to the men of the left who had accepted Garibaldi's program of revolutionary unification but in the name of the crown of Savoy, a carefully balanced political project that nonetheless enabled Cavour's political agenda to dominate and determine the construction of the new Italian kingdom. Cavour's success was a consequence of the action taken on the ground by his envoys, including Salvatore Pes di Villamarina. In 1860 Villamarina was the Sardinian ambassador to Naples, where he worked as a link between the government of Cavour and Garibaldi's dictatorship and paved the way for delivery of the Two Sicilies to Vittorio Emanuele.

Villamarina was driven by a patriotism very different to that of Asproni and the democrats, a patriotism born on the fertile ground of a socially ascending

family, and shaped in the shadow of the monarchy and the reform plan adopted in Sardinia by the Piedmontese. Villamarina's origins were not Piedmontese, as is often wrongly claimed, but Sardinian: his family had played a leading role among the Sardinian families who took it upon themselves throughout the eighteenth century to put into effect the plans designed in Turin to strip Sardinia of its 'Spanish' inheritance. This has resulted, among other things, in reform of the university, the creation of the 'Censorato Generale', an institution that had economic and cultural consequences, and the launch of a campaign of demographic reorganization and settlements the outcomes of which remain to be studied in a systematic way.

Those reforms had been the training grounds for numerous State officials and had provided the main cultural nourishment for the pro-Savoy intellectuals mentioned in the first part of this article. They constituted a moral world that was moved by the sincere conviction that Piedmont would be the force for redemption and civilization, and hence capable of offering Sicily and Naples benefits similar to those already enjoyed in Sardinia. These ideas, which have often been concealed under the label 'Piedmont', became a quite extraordinary force of propaganda. Throughout the first half of the century they were reflected in history books, parliamentary speeches and relentless publicity activities that established the ideological premises for the 'Piedmontization' of southern Italy.

The fulfillment of Cavour's designs in August 1860 marked the culmination of this intense propaganda activity, against which Mazzini's republicans began with the example of Sardinia. In his articles on Sardinia, Mazzini pointed the finger at the 'corrupting and immoral system' that had governed it for decades and now was likely to be extended to the whole of Italy. He denounced a 'materialistic cult that was hostile to the People, which now usurps the direction of our movement' and the presence of a political elite in Sardinia that was 'incapable of raising itself to the level and concept of the National Government' (Mazzini 1995, 185), a 'government of tyranny, of an arbitrary nature, of corruption' that made the defeat of the people certain: 'I wish the People would show that they are capable of resisting only twenty years of such government, without turning to conditions of semi-barbarism' (1995, 181, 184).

The philhellenic narrative device had been modified to fit the Italian domestic front: the barbaric conditions of Sardinia were the consequence of Piedmontese domination, which would be exported to the former Bourbon kingdom, with the endorsement of plebiscites decided by Turin. The only alternative to this tendency was the one offered by the republicans, who were not 'accomplices to the government's crimes . . . we want to eradicate them, as soon as our guaranteed Unification gives us the chance to grant freedom and reform the domestic social and political order' in Sardinia as in the rest of Italy (Mazzini 1995, 166). In the great republican political vision, the Risorgimento was to be only the first part of a much wider European resurgence. The Italian Republic, the fruit of the popular conquest of Venice and Rome, would deal a terrible blow to the 'fatal Austrian Empire', from the ruins of which would emerge 'the

republican federation of the whole of Germany; Hungary will be born, and Poland, that ancient bulwark of European civilization against overwhelming Muscovite barbarism will be restored'. Also, the brothers of Romania 'will be organized as a republic, and renew their ancient brotherhood with us Italians' and act as 'guardians of the Danube to prevent the waves of barbarian Tartary invasions' (Asproni 1974, 489). This great geo-political vision was rooted in the profoundly Eurocentric principles of the philhellenic discourse, but it served to connect the local to the wider processes of transnational resurgences. The local and the transnational intermingled and became interdependent, so that both regional and European homelands were seen to be participating in a revolutionary process that would rewrite global geography to reflect both the values of Mazzinian republicanism and those of the bourgeois and the Romantic Europe of the nineteenth century.

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Notes

- 1 A concise review of Italian philhellenic activity can be found in Di Benedetto (1999b).
- 2 For an account of the influence of Lord Byron on the Italian Risorgimento, see Ginsborg (2007).
- 3 Vivanet shared the same opinion (1866).
- 4 The archives of the Reale Udienza, held by the State Archive of Cagliari, contain tens of thousands of lawsuits, representing almost four centuries of legal battles for control of the land and the management of land resources by shepherds and farmers.

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