

**OCCULTISM AND TRADITIONALISM**  
**ARTURO REGHINI AND THE ANTIMODERN REACTION**  
**IN EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY ITALY**



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‘All that is gold does not glitter,  
not all those who wander are lost;  
the old that is strong does not wither,  
deep roots are not reached by the frost’.

J.R.R. TOLKIEN, *The Fellowship of the Ring*



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**ARTURO REGHINI (1878-1946) AS AN OFFICIAL  
OF THE REGIO ESERCITO ITALIANO (ca. 1915)**

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## CHAPTER 1:

### INTRODUCTION: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY; PREVIOUS RESEARCH AND CHAPTER DIVISION

‘37 - Progress is equivalent to non-being’.<sup>1</sup>  
Amedeo Rocco Armentano

#### 1. ANTIMODERN SENTIMENTS IN MODERN ITALY

In 1914, one year before Italy’s involvement in the Great War, an article appeared in *Salamandra* (*Salamander*), a cultural publication with a small following of enthusiasts, signed by a then relatively obscure occultist, mathematician, essayist and self avowed neo-Pythagorean: Arturo Reghini (1878-1946). The author’s contribution to the literary periodical was entitled ‘Imperialismo Pagano’ (‘Heathen Imperialism’), and it vividly contrasted the positivist, progressive worldview, which permeated a vast section of the Italian modern culture of the day.<sup>2</sup> The article denounced some of the very staples of what sociologists, from Max Weber to Anthony Giddens have, through the decades, judged to be intrinsic to modern culture: mass democracy, secularisation, the de-traditionalisation of society, and the idea of a ‘disenchanted

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Progredire é lo stesso che non essere’, Amedeo Rocco Armentano, *Massime di Scienze Iniziatiche* (Ancona: Ignis, 1992), p. 146.

<sup>2</sup> Arturo Reghini, ‘Imperialismo Pagano’, in *Salamandra* 1:1 (1914), republished in *Atanòr* 1:3 (1924), pp. 69-85. I will be referring to the *Atanòr* version throughout the dissertation, an edition expanded and revised by the author himself. For other writings of Reghini, which challenged the modern status quo in the early part of his career, see ‘La Tradizione Italica’, *Ultra*, 7:2 (1914), pp.68-70; ‘Trascendenza di Spazio e di Tempo’, *Mondo Occulto* 6:6 (1926), pp. 69-107; ‘Istituzioni di Scienze Occulte’, *Leonardo* 4:2 (1906) pp. 155-160; ‘La Massoneria come Fattore Individuale’, *Leonardo* 4:4 (1906) pp. 297-310; ‘Il Punto di Vista dell’Occultismo’, *Leonardo* 5:2 (1907), pp. 144-156. It is fundamental to notice that occultists were by no means the only authors to rebel against the tenets of the modern world with a staunch antipositivist attitude: as we shall see, Benedetto Croce (1866-1952) and his idealist philosophy permeated much of the antipositivist discourse of the time. See chapter three for an exhaustive coverage of Croce’s influence on Italian culture in general, and Reghini and his fellow intellectuals, in particular.

West', to name but a few.<sup>3</sup> Modern society as 'a progressive force promising to liberate humankind from ignorance and irrationality' was by no means the *weltanschauung* advocated by the article.<sup>4</sup> In it Reghini vehemently attacks the Vatican and the Catholic nationalists, guilty of wielding too much political power, and deplores the 'universal suffrage', which has 'granted access to active politics to almost all of the illiterate and malleable mass of the nation'.<sup>5</sup> More importantly, and relevant for the purposes of my thesis, Reghini writes about the existence of an uninterrupted chain of initiates, from King Numa Pompilius (753-673 BC) to Vergil (50-19 BC), from Dante Alighieri (1265-1321) to Giuseppe Mazzini (1805-1872), who had been the custodians of a Pagan Roman tradition, from the foundation of the Eternal City right up to the early twentieth century.<sup>6</sup> This tradition, secretly handed down through the generations, would prove essential to the twentieth-century alleged manifestation of the current that has been called by its advocates the *Schola Italica* (Italic School), an antimodern, neo-Pythagorean, initiatory order, which sought to restore order to what was perceived as a modern chaotic Italian society, through a return to the traditional ideals of Ancient Rome, to be applied in the early twentieth century.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1964 [1922]), p. 270-272, and Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), pp. 10-34. See also, James Beckford, 'The Disenchantment of Postmodernity', *New Blackfriars* 73:913 (2007), pp. 121-128; Ralph Schroeder, 'Disenchantment and its Discontents', *Sociological Review* 43:2 (1995), pp. 227-250; Gilbert G. Germain, *A Discourse on Disenchantment: Reflections on Politics and Technology* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1993); last, but closest to the subject matter of the thesis, Wouter J. Hanegraaff, 'How Magic Survived the Disenchantment of the World', *Religion* 33 (2003), pp. 357-380; Kristina Karin Shull, 'Has the Magic Gone? Weber's Disenchantment of the World and its Implications for Art in Today's World', *Anamesa: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 3:2 (2005), pp. 61-73; Egil Asprem, *The Problem of Disenchantment: Scientific Naturalism and Esoteric Discourse, 1900-1939* (Leiden: Brill, 2015); idem, 'The Disenchantment of Problems: Musings on a Cognitive Turn in Intellectual History', *Journal of Religion in Europe* 8 (2015), pp. 304-319.

<sup>4</sup> Pauline Marie Rosenau, *Post-Modernism and the Social Sciences: Insights. Inroads, Intrusions* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 5.

<sup>5</sup> 'il suffragio universale che ha condotto a partecipare all'attività politica quasi tutta la massa incolta e malleabile della nazione', in Reghini, 'Imperialismo', p. 71.

<sup>6</sup> The strategy of using an unbroken chain of transmission as a means of legitimization of Reghini's discourse, an Italic autochthonic one, will be fully analysed later in the dissertation.

<sup>7</sup> The survival of Pythagorean thought in Italy throughout the centuries does not apply to the twentieth century and Reghini's coterie only: it is a wide and extensive phenomenon, which appears to have ancient roots: Pythagoras's birthplace, usually attributed to the Greek island of Samos, has been questioned by many Italian authors, through the centuries: Pythagoras is considered Italian tout-court by works such as Vincenzo Capparelli, *Il Messaggio di Pitagora: Il Pitagorismo nel Tempo* (Rome: Edizioni Mediterranee, 2003 [1944]), where

But who was Arturo Reghini, a self proclaimed antimodern intellectual? What were his links to the Traditionalist movement called *Schola Italica*, which he wrote about in many articles and publications? Was he a lone Don Quixote in his fight against the windmills of modernity, and was he alone, in days when most sought occult wisdom in foreign authors and Eastern texts, to crave for a return to a pristine autochthone tradition in order to escape from Weber's infamous *stahlhartes Gehäuse*?<sup>8</sup> Contemporary studies on the interaction between modernity and occultism have proven beyond a shadow of doubt that, indeed, occultism cannot be simply seen only as a reaction by alienated individuals who resented objective reality and 'try to elicit meaning from it by saying abracadabra',<sup>9</sup> culminating in James Webb's definition of occultism as a 'flight from reason'.<sup>10</sup> Yet, however well the theories may fit one author's agenda, such claims are not universal, and must not lead to a pernicious tendency to over generalise, since the impact of modernity on occultism, as will be seen, varied sensibly from country to country, from one occult milieu to another. To quote sociologist Jeffrey Herf, '[t]here is no such thing as modernity in

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Tommaso Campanella, Giordano Bruno and Bernardino Telesio are all said to have been inspired by the pre-Socratic philosopher: 'Have Bruno, Campanella and Telesio thought to reconnect themselves, as their precursors, to Saint Thomas, Saint Augustine, to Plotinus, or rather to the Pythagoreans and Eleatics?', p. 192; other works in a similar vein include both scholarly literature and works with a more emic approach: , amongst the first see, Dominic J. O'Meara, *Pythagoras Revived* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); Christoph Riedweg, *Pythagoras: His Life, Teaching and Influence* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005); Christiane L. Joost-Gaugier, *Measuring Heaven, Pythagoras and his Influence on Thought and Art in Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006); Kitty Ferguson, *Pythagoras, his Life and the Legacy of a Rational Universe* (London: Walker Publishing Company, 2008); for a more 'insider' approach, see Paolo Galliano, *Roma prima di Roma, Metastoria della Tradizione Italica* (Rome: Simmetria Edizioni, 2011); Giuseppe Lo Monaco, *L'Ordine Osirideo Egizio e la Trasmissione Pitagorica* (Bassano del Grappa: np., 1999); Paolo Casini, *L'Antica Sapienza Italica* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1998).

<sup>8</sup> Three biographies have been published in Italian on Reghini: the first, by his disciple Giulio Parise, may be found in Arturo Reghini, *Considerazioni sul Rituale dell'Apprendista Muratore, con una nota sulla vita e sull'Attività Massonica dell'Autore* (Naples: Edizioni di Studi Iniziatici, 1946), pp. v-xv. For decades these scant pages have been the only biographical material at the disposal of the general reader, until the following biographies were published in the new millennium: Roberto Sestito, *Il Figlio del Sole: Vita e Opere di Arturo Reghini Filosofo e Matematico* (Ancona: Associazione Culturale Ignis, 2006) and Natale Mario di Luca, *Arturo Reghini: Un Intellettuale Neo-Pitagorico tra Massoneria e Fascismo* (Rome: Atanor, 2003).

<sup>9</sup> Theodor Adorno, 'Theses Against Occultism', in *The Stars Down to Earth and Other Essays on the Irrational in Culture*, ed. and introduction by Stephen Crook (London: Routledge, 1994 [1974]), p. 174.

<sup>10</sup> James Webb, *Flight From Reason* (London: MacDonald & Co., 1971).

general. There are only national societies, each of which becomes modern in its own fashion'.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, it will be up to my dissertation to demonstrate that some aspects seen to be thoroughly compatible with modernity in an occult order in Great Britain, the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn (est. 1888), for example, do not apply to a country like Italy and an esoteric tradition like the one represented by Reghini's writings.<sup>12</sup>

Contemporary scholars, such as Alex Owen, Marco Pasi, Corinna Treitel and David Harvey, to cite the most prominent, who have analysed the complex relationship between the surge of interest in occultism and the allegedly positivist, secularist, Enlightenment-inspired qualities of modernity, *pace* Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, have almost unanimously viewed occultism as a progressive, integral aspect of the modern world, indeed a forum in which new social conquests (emancipation of woman and democratization of access to knowledge, to name but two key factors) would make their first appearance, before slowly trickling down to mass society.<sup>13</sup> The reason for this trend is relatively straightforward, if one only considers the extremely multifaceted nature of the terms used, and the malleability of these concepts (in contrast to Zygmunt Bauman's idea of a rigidly characterised *heavy* modernity opposed to a postmodern, fragmented and *liquid* one) have allowed authors to describe modernity as everything and its opposite.<sup>14</sup>

Sociologist Marshall Berman has attempted a description of the slippery, almost intangible qualities of modern life, which may aid the reader, not only in his comprehension of modernity's quality per se, but also in acknowledging the existence of individuals and groups of people strongly opposed to the effects of modernity: Berman describes the 'maelstrom of modern' life as being characterised by scientific

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<sup>11</sup> Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998 [1984]), p. 1.

<sup>12</sup> See the theoretical framework of my dissertation on multiple modernities, which I will discuss later in the chapter.

<sup>13</sup> For more on the individual scholars and their theses on occultism and modernism, see section 2 of this chapter.

<sup>14</sup> One example, out of many, is Leszek Kolakowski, 'Modernity on Endless Trial', *Encounter* 66 (1986), pp. 8-12, where the author expressly admits (p. 9) that 'we have no idea what Modernity is'. Bruno Latour, in *Nous n'Avons Jamais Été Modernes: Essai d'Anthropologie Symétrique* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993 [1991]), p. 10, states that 'modernity comes in as many versions as there are thinkers or journalists'.

discoveries; a massive increase of industrialization; the creation of new human environments which end up phagocytising old ones; demographic upheavals (which, as I have written above, were a strong concern for Reghini); the rise of national states and of a capitalist world market, for example.<sup>15</sup> Berman's depiction of twentieth-century modernity as a world in which 'everything is pregnant with its contrary' will be crucial in trying to understand certain underlying tensions, between the progressive and the reactionary, in Reghini's writings:<sup>16</sup> if all contains a germ of its opposite, it is also quite true that early twentieth-century modernity, in Berman's view, is either accepted wholly with enthusiasm, or else is 'condemned with a neo-Olympian remoteness and contempt'.<sup>17</sup> Although this may seem an extreme position to hold, it does help bolster a critical assumption in my dissertation: my hypothesis is that an elitist, antimodern, Traditionalist milieu, sometimes even prone to totalitarian political ideas, obviously *did* actually exist in modern times and that a balance must be struck between the older theoretical constructs: these bound occultism to a one way journey to irrational and totalitarian ideas *a priori*, while the newer, more nuanced, scholarship which views occultism as an integral part of modernity, but seems to ignore some facets of modern expression, since even antimodernism, in this case, must be seen as a modern phenomenon, albeit less congenial to its theses. Another useful distinction is given by Roger Griffin in the division between epiphanic and progressive modernism: the first is seen as a revolt against modernity merely confined to 'aesthetic, religious and spiritual quests, articulated in both literature and painting, for ephemeral experiences'.<sup>18</sup> Griffin's description of programmatic modernism resembles the spirit found in Reghini's writings in a much more potent way:

A quite different face of modernism manifests itself when the creative *élan* towards a higher *subjectively* perceived plane of existence becomes sufficiently intense to break free from the modern 'slough of despond' altogether, and mutates into the sustained aspiration to create a new

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<sup>15</sup> Marshall Berman, *All That is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (London: Verso, 2010 [1982]), p. 16.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>18</sup> Roger Griffin, 'Modernity, Modernism, and Fascism. A Mazeway Resynthesis', *Modernism/Modernity* 15:1 (2008), pp. 9-24 (p. 11).

*objective*, external world, a new future premised on the radical rejection of and opposition to prevailing reality.<sup>19</sup>

*Est modus in rebus*, quoth Horace (65–8 BC) in his *Satires* (35 BC), and it is my firm conviction that the study of anti-modern writings like Reghini's will help paint a clearer picture of this relationship than has been presented to date.<sup>20</sup> In attempting to provide a definition of reactionary modernism in Weimar Germany, Herf writes of 'nationalists who turned the romantic capitalism of the German Right away from backward-looking pastoralism, pointing instead to the outline of a beautiful new order replacing the formless chaos due to capitalism in a united [...] nation'.<sup>21</sup> Reghini was acutely aware of the modern world he lived in, and, through his writings, conveyed a sense of modernity itself providing the opportunity of a new beginning, which had been building up since the final years of the *Risorgimento*, an historical phase in Italian history culminating in the unification of the peninsula, and which would manifest itself, on the political plane, with the rise of the Fascist regime.<sup>22</sup> What marked the difference between his Traditionalist brand of occultism and other occultist movements was not a mere irrational rejection of modernity tout-court, but the deep-felt need to employ traditional tools for the spiritual reconstruction of modern Italy. Hence, the core question of my thesis can be thus formulated:

***How and why did Arturo Reghini and his circles of friends react so vehemently against the Modern, and what can the analysis of his life and writings offer to the ongoing debate regarding the intricate relationship between occultism and modernity?***<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>20</sup> 'There is a measure in things', Quintus Horatius Flaccus, *Satyrarum Libri*, book I, v. 106.

<sup>21</sup> Herf, *Reactionary Modernism*, p. 2.

<sup>22</sup> See Roger Griffin's seminal *Modernism and Fascism: The Sense of a New Beginning under Hitler and Mussolini* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Walter Adamson, 'Modernism and Fascism. The Politics of Culture in Italy', 1903-1922, *The American Historical Review* 95:2 (1990), pp.359-390; David Crowley, 'Nationalist Modernisms', in *Modernism 1914-1939, Designing a New World*, ed. by Christopher Wilk (London: V&A Publications, 2006), pp. 371-373; Emilio Gentile, 'The Myth of National Regeneration in Italy. From Modernist Avant-garde to Fascism', in *Fascist Visions*, ed. by Matthew Affron and Mark Antliff (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. 25-45.

<sup>23</sup> A section dedicated to Traditionalism and Roman Traditionalism, in particular, will follow shortly.



It is my hypothesis that Reghini's writings are not only a way to penetrate the oft neglected antimodern occultist Italian milieu specifically, but will prove to be of great relevance in the wider study of that section of population, which indeed opposed notions of progress and modernization, and acutely felt the seemingly nefarious effects to be found in what scholar Jeffrey C. Alexander has defined 'the dark side of modernity'.<sup>24</sup>

As discussed, my dissertation will focus on Italian occultism, specifically on Arturo Reghini and, to a lesser degree, on his mentor Amedeo Rocco Armentano (1886-1966). The chapters of the dissertation will have a triple function: on the one hand, they will chronologically provide the reader with an analysis of the life and of the articles and books by Reghini himself, who in his lifespan came into contact with most of the esoteric manifestations of his day: from Theosophy to Freemasonry, to neo-Pagan and Traditionalist environments: firstly, the study of Reghini's writings will help me flesh out a solid biographical account, whose main purpose will be that of providing a *fil rouge* for the reader to follow; secondly, in each chapter I will endeavour to intertwine Reghini's life with some of modernity's major elements, opening up to the wider field of sociology of religions, and therefore focusing on the 'dark-side' elements of modern, or antimodern, life of the early-twentieth century: the reaction to positivism, the rise of avant-gardes, the relationship between occult orders and the Vatican and the Fascist regime. In this way I will a wider picture of the many nuances in which Italy differed from other European countries when analysing how antimodernists may have experienced what philosopher Charles Taylor defined as the 'malaise of modernity'.<sup>25</sup> Through Reghini's biography and writings, I will thus aim to typify the discomfort caused by modernity, suffered not only by the Florentine thinker himself, but by some of his close associates belonging to non-occult wider intellectual circles, whether members of the countercultural Florentine *Scapigliatura* such as journalists and writers Giovanni Papini (1881-1856) and Giuseppe Prezzolini (1882-1982) or Freemasons battling against Fascist censorship. Thirdly, it is my belief that such an approach to Reghini's writings would help me better shed light on a

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<sup>24</sup> Jeffrey C. Alexander, *The Dark Side of Modernity* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2013).

<sup>25</sup> Charles Taylor, *The Malaise of Modernity* (Toronto: Anansi Press, 1991). A precise division of chapters and outline of the thesis will be provided in section 4, at the end of the present chapter.

segment of occultism which has yet to receive due attention in the smaller field of Western esotericism: that of Traditionalism, in general, and Roman Traditionalism in particular. In the study of Italian esotericism, the last century witnesses a depressing dearth of scholarship in the English language.<sup>26</sup> Whether the reason might be found in the vitality and progressive nature of other contemporary occult expressions abroad, or to some links to Fascism, which still looms over Italian history as a menacing taboo, I am nevertheless convinced that an etic approach to the subject material could be found to be vital for a better understanding of the idea of antimodernity in Reghini's private dimension, in the more contained domain of Western esotericism, and in the wider field of religious studies.

Apart from the wide-ranged approaches that my dissertation will employ, it is my intention to focus on the relevance of the writings of Arturo Reghini to the English-speaking world, since only a handful of articles, which are completely devoted to him, to date, have been published in foreign academic journals.<sup>27</sup> Both academic and non-scholarly studies of Reghini's writings have been severely lacking in Italy too. While the right-wing culture, which in the post-war period hailed Julius Evola (1898-1974) as its main philosophical referent, rejected Reghini because of his Masonic ties, Freemasonry dismissed his work because of his neo-Pagan stance. An anti-Christian approach, writes historian of Freemasonry Natale Mario di Luca, 'inevitably brought him to an ideological anti-Semitism', Reghini giving Christianity

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<sup>26</sup> Notable exceptions to the rule are Marco Pasi, 'Theosophy and Anthroposophy in Italy during the First Half of the Twentieth Century', *Theosophical History, a Quarterly Journal of Research* 16:2 (2012), pp. 81-119; Hans Thomas Hakl, 'The Theory and Practice of Sexual Magic, Exemplified by Four Magical Groups in the Early Twentieth Century', in *Hidden Intercourse: Eros and Sexuality in the History of Western Esotericism*, ed. by Wouter J. Hanegraaff and Jeffrey J. Kripal (Leiden: Brill, 2008), pp.445-478; idem, 'Julius Evola and the UR Group', *Aries* 12:1, (2012), pp. 53-90; idem, 'Nazionalsocialismo ed Occultismo', *Arthos* 1:1, (1997) pp. 16-27 and 1:2 (1997), pp. 57-75; Peter Staudenmaier, *Between Occultism and Fascism: Antroposophy and the Politics of Race in the Fascist Era* (Brill: Leiden, 2014); Mark Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World: Traditionalism and the Secret Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); idem, 'How Traditional are the Traditionalists? The Case of the Guenonian Sufis', *Aries* 22 (1999), pp. 3-24; Roberto Bacci, *La Trasmutazione della Coscienza nell'Esoterismo Italiano del Periodo Fascista: Spaccio dei Maghi (1929) Di Mario Manlio Rossi e Maschera e Volto dello Spiritualismo Contemporaneo (1932) Di Julius Evola*, unpublished PhD dissertation.

<sup>27</sup> Dana Lloyd Thomas, 'Arturo Reghini: A Modern Pythagorean', *Gnosis* 44 (1997), pp. 52-59; idem, 'Arturo Reghini', in *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, ed. by Wouter J. Hanegraaff, Antoine Faivre, Roelof van der Broek and Jean-Pierre Brach (Brill: Leiden, 2006), pp. 979-980; Lazlo Toth, 'Arturo Reghini', *Politica Hermetica*, 1 (1987), pp. 143-155.

the definition of ‘semitic disease’.<sup>28</sup> This caused Reghini to be all but forgotten until the turn of the century, when his works started to enjoy increasing success and two biographies have been devoted to him. But while di Luca takes a reductionist stance when judging Reghini’s occult writings, lamenting ‘a marvelous manifestation of collective narcissistic pathology [...] on the verge of delusions of grandeur’,<sup>29</sup> Roberto Sestito, a neo-Pythagorean follower of Reghini’s Roman Traditionalism, employs an overtly religionist stance that mars an otherwise well-researched work.

As independent scholar Dana Lloyd Thomas argues, Reghini ‘was a key figure in 20th century Italian esotericism’.<sup>30</sup> His first-hand experience in the establishment of the first group of the Theosophical Society in Italy, his role in attempting to restore the spiritual traditions of Freemasonry, his revival of neo-Pythagorean philosophy and his deep interest in occult matters, definitely make Reghini a key figure, with ties to almost every aspect of the Italian esoteric environment of his time. By studying Reghini’s life and writings, we also study the developments of the esoteric discourse in Italy at the beginning of the twentieth century. Through his journals, ‘a landmark in Italian esoteric literature’,<sup>31</sup> Reghini drew together the most varied fringes of occultist expression, from the therapeutic circle gathered around Giuliano Kremmerz (1861-1930) to Italian exponents of Anthroposophy such as Giovanni Colonna di Cesarò (1878-1940) and Giovanni Colazza (1877-1953); from the Traditionalists Julius Evola and Guido de Giorgio (1890-1957) to neo-pagans and neo-Pythagoreans Amedeo Armentano and Giulio Parise (1902-1970).<sup>32</sup>

Before moving on to the previous research available to me, I would briefly like to list the different elements that form the *Corpus Reghinianum*. The first part of his career is focused mainly on articles written on journals, the Florentine *La Voce* (1906) and

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<sup>28</sup> di Luca, *Reghini*, p. 158: ‘Lo portò inevitabilmente ad un antisemitismo ideologico’.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 105. ‘un impressionante manifestazione d’invasamento narcisistico [...], ai limiti del delirio di onnipotenza’.

<sup>30</sup> Thomas, ‘Arturo Reghini’, p. 789.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 780.

<sup>32</sup> See Michele Beraldo, ‘Le Riviste Spiritualistiche, Occultiste ed Esoteriche durante il Regime’, in *Esoterismo e Fascismo*, ed. by Gianfranco de Turreis (Rome: Mediterranee, 2006), pp. 383-387; Marco Rossi, ‘L’Interventismo Politico-Culturale delle Riviste Tradizionaliste negli Anni Venti’, *Storia Contemporanea* 18:3 (1987), pp. 457-504; Francesco Saverio Festa, ‘Teosofia ed Esoterismo nelle Riviste Italiane della Prima Metà del 900’, in *Pioniere, Poeten, Professoren: Eranos und der Monte Verità in der Zivilisationsgeschichte des 20 Jahrhunderts*, ed. by Elisabetta Barone, Matthias Riedl and Alexandra Tischel (Wurzburg: Konigshausen & Neumann, 2004), pp. 143-154.

*Leonardo* (1906-7), the Futurist *Lacerba* (1913-1915), the more politically oriented *Salamandra* (1914) and *Patria* (1914), the theosophical journal *Ultra* (1914), the masonic *Rassegna Massonica* (1923-1924), his 1907 and 1908 lectures at the *Biblioteca Filosofica* in Florence; his substantial introduction to Cornelius Agrippa's *De Occulta Philosophia* (1927) will no doubt offer a new insight to the interrelationship between science, religion and magic in modern-day Italy, as will his works on occult journals edited by him such as *Atanòr* (1924), *Ignis* (1925) and *Ur* (1927-1928). His book *Le parole sacre di passo dei primi tre gradi ed il massimo mistero massonico* (*The Sacred Pass-Words of the First Three Grades and the Greatest Masonic Mystery*, 1922), will provide a less thorough approach to political and social issues, but will prove to be a veritable gold mine when analysing the author's Traditionalist views. Private correspondence between Reghini and some of his colleagues will be invaluable in trying to come to terms with Reghini as an anti-modern thinker living in a modern world. Such correspondence includes hitherto unpublished letters to the putative father of Traditionalism René Guénon (1886-1951).

## 2. PREVIOUS RESEARCH

### 2.1 OCCULTISM AND MODERNITY

Right up to the mid-1980s, occultism in the light of modernity had been perceived as a nuisance, which bothered most sociologists and historians of religions: described as an irrational yearning caused by the rational and progressive nature of modernity itself, occultism was perceived to be an unsound element, worthy of being readily tossed in the 'conceptual waste-basket of rejected knowledge'.<sup>33</sup> In three sentences in his *Theses*, Theodor Adorno had summed up his ideas on the irrationality within the discourse between occultism and modernity:

Occultism is the metaphysic of dunces. The mediocrity of the mediums is no more accidental than the apocryphal triviality of the revelations. Since the early days of spiritualism the Beyond has communicated nothing more

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<sup>33</sup> Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 221.

significant than the dead grandmother's greetings and the prophecy of an imminent journey.<sup>34</sup>

It must be stressed that Adorno's, or Marcello Truzzi's, knowledge of occultism was sorely lacking. His approach to the subject matter was never that of a rigorous scholar, but that of a theorist who needed an element of ridicule in order to prove his theories, and found it in the horoscopes of mainstream newspapers, or, in Truzzi's case, in the 1960s boom of sales of Ouija boards, which, according to him, for a period of time, outsold the board game *Monopoly*.<sup>35</sup> This trend witnessed a change in the seriousness of the approach to it with independent scholar James Webb's publication of *Flight from Reason* (1974). Despite being a well-researched and scholarly work, from the first sentence of the first chapter, the author elucidated his beliefs on occultism with a statement that almost reads as an epitaph: '[a]fter the Age of Reason, came the Age of the Irrational'.<sup>36</sup> But in the eyes of cultural critics, Italy's Fascist regime did not possess the same connection to occultism that Nazi Germany provided, and the anti-esoteric rhetoric in Italy was sensibly less present in the post-war period.<sup>37</sup> Thus Italy,

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<sup>34</sup> Adorno, *Theses*, p. 241: 'Okkultismus ist die Metaphysik der dummen Kerle. Die Subalternität der Medien ist so wenig zufällig wie das Apokryphe, Läppische des Geoffenbarten. Seit den frühen Tagen des Spiritismus hat das Jenseits nichts Erheblicheres kundgetan als Grüße der verstorbenen Großmutter nebst der Prophezeiung, eine Reise stünde bevor.' Adorno was obviously not the only critic of occultism as an irrational anomaly within the larger framework of modernity: see also Marcello Truzzi, 'The Occult Revival as Popular Culture: Some Random Observations on the Old and Nouveau Witch', *The Sociological Quarterly* 13 (1972), pp. 16-36; Andrew M. Greeley, 'Implications for the Sociology of Reason of Occult Behaviour in the Youth Culture', in *On the Margin of the Visible: Sociology, the Esoteric and the Occult*, ed. by Edward A. Tiryakian (New York: Wiley, 1974), pp. 295-302; John Straude, 'Alienated Youth and the Cult of the Occult', in *Sociology for the Seventies*, ed. by Morris Medley and James E. Conyers (New York, Wiley, 1970).

<sup>35</sup> Truzzi, 'Occult Revival', p. 20.

<sup>36</sup> Webb, *Flight*, p. 1. See also Hugh Trevor-Ropers' theories in *The Last Days of Hitler* (London: Macmillan, 1974) or *Consciousness and Society: the Reorientation of European Social Thought, 1890-1930* (London: Transaction, 2002): 'How can the reaction against positivism avoid the very irrationalism that positivism had not been able to avert once it fell prey to social Darwinism, "heredity" and "environment" [...]?', p. xiii.

<sup>37</sup> Perhaps the most vehement attack against occultism in Italian language may be found in the works of Benedetto Croce, who, after a brief support for the regime, ended up considering Fascism to be a 'moral disease': see, Francesco Baroni, *Benedetto Croce e l'Esoterismo* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2011): 'The radical refusal on Croce's behalf [...], of the esoteric manifestations of *fin-de-siècle* esotericism, derives from seeing in them a degenerative form of "irrationalism"', p. 12; Benedetto Croce, *Storia d'Italia. Dal 1871 al 1915*, ed. by Giuseppe Galasso (Milan: Adelphi, 1991 [1928]); see also Cecilia Gatto Trocchi, the works

while witnessing an obvious backlash against all things that remotely drew the mind to the Fascist period, lacked the brand of sensationalist authors such as Louis Pauwels, Jacques Bergier or Trevor Ravenscroft, an ominous presence with their writings on the Third Reich, willing to perpetuate the idea of occult ties between occultists and Italian politics:<sup>38</sup> to quote author Gianfranco de Turrís, ‘we cannot speak – no matter what some people may think – of a “fascist esotericism”, that is to say neither an official or off-the-record esoteric dimension of fascism’.<sup>39</sup>

In recent scholarship, occultism has been defined with a wide array of definitions, although I will be using Wouter J. Hanegraaff’s definition of occultism, seen as comprising:

All attempts by esotericists to come to terms with a disenchanted world, or, alternatively, by people in general to make sense of esotericism from the perspective of a disenchanted world.<sup>40</sup>

Marco Pasi characterizes occultism by some distinguishing traits that may be found in Reghini’s theories, such as the overcoming of the conflict between science and religion, an anti-Christian stance that led occultists to fulfill their spiritual needs in pagan traditions and the great relevance played by the ‘spiritual realization of the

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most interesting for my research being *Storia Esoterica d'Italia* (Milano: Piemme, 2001); *Il Risorgimento Esoterico, Storia Esoterica d'Italia da Mazzini ai Giorni Nostri* (Milano: Mondadori, 1996); *Viaggio nella Magia: La Cultura Esoterica nell'Italia di Oggi* (Rome: Laterza, 1996); a more intriguing theory on ‘Ur-Fascism’ or ‘Eternal Fascism’ is provided by Umberto Eco in his *Cinque Scritti Morali* (Milan: Bompiani, 1997) and *Il Fascismo Eterno* (Milan: Bompiani, 1997) and Furio Jesi, *Cultura di destra. Con tre inediti e un'intervista*, ed. by Andrea Cavalletti (Rome: Nottetempo [1993] 2011), in which the irrational attraction to totalitarianism is tackled by these two thinkers.

<sup>38</sup> See the Nazi occultism theories in Louis Pauwels and Jacques Bergier, *Le Matin des Magiciens* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960); Trevor Ravenscroft, *The Spear of Destiny* (New York: Bantam, 1974); these are but two examples of literature aiming to connect Nazi ideology and occultism: for a thorough treatment of the phenomenon, see Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, ‘The Modern Mythology of Nazi Occultism’, in idem, *The Occult Roots of Nazism: Aryan Cults and their Influence on Nazi Ideology* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2004), pp. 217-226.

<sup>39</sup> *Esoterismo e Fascismo*, p. 10. ‘non si può invece parlare – checché ne possa pensare qualcuno – di un “esoterismo fascista”, vale a dire di una dimensione esoterica né ufficiale né ufficiosa del fascismo.’

<sup>40</sup> Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1998), p. 422.

individual’.<sup>41</sup>

Since the beginning of the new millennium, studies have mostly provided a more sympathetic approach to the subject matter: academics have striven to swing the pendulum between the rational and the irrational as far away from Adorno and other post-war theorists as possible, creating, in my opinion, an even greater imbalance of judgment when dealing with the occultism-modernity connection. In Alison Butler’s words, ‘most of the recent scholarship on nineteenth-century occultism in Britain, France and Germany contribute to a current challenge to debunk the long-standing equation of modernity with disenchantment’.<sup>42</sup> In their eagerness to validate occultism as a respectable field of enquiry, they have followed Hanegraaff’s theory according to which magic survived the disenchantment of the world by adapting to the new mechanics and worldviews of modernity,<sup>43</sup> but over-generalizing the globalizing elements of occultism, thus almost treating occultism like any other bourgeois commodity of the period.<sup>44</sup> An example is Marco Pasi, who in his article ‘The Modernity of Occultism’, first states the intention to draw conclusions ‘about the way the ways which esotericism has interacted with modern Western society and culture’,<sup>45</sup> only to restrict his scope to the well known Theosophical Society (est. 1875) and

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<sup>41</sup> Marco Pasi, ‘Occultism’, in *The Brill Dictionary of Religion*, ed. by Kocku Von Stuckrad, trans. by Robert R. Barr, Vol. III (Leiden: Brill, 2006), p. 1366. For earlier definitions of the term, see Antoine Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism* (Albany, SUNY Press, 1994); Antoine Faivre, ‘Questions of Terminology Proper to Study of Esoteric Currents in Modern and Contemporary Europe’, in *Western Esotericism and the Science of Religion*, ed. by Antoine Faivre and Wouter J. Hanegraaff (Louvain: Peeters, 1998), pp. 1-10; Robert Galbreath, ‘Explaining Modern Occultism’, in *The Occult in America: New Historical Perspectives*, ed. by Howard Kerr and Charles L. Crow (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1983), pp. 11-37.

<sup>42</sup> Alison Butler, *Victorian Occultism and the Making of Modern Magic: Invoking Tradition* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. x.

<sup>43</sup> See Hanegraaff, ‘How Magic’.

<sup>44</sup> See Butler, *Victorian Occultism*; Alison Butler, ‘Making Magic Modern: Nineteenth-Century Adaptations’, *The Pomegranate* 6:2 (2004), pp. 212-230; Alex Owen, *The Disenchantment of the West: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (Chicago: University Press of Chicago, 2004); Marco Pasi, ‘The Modernity of Occultism: Reflections on Some Crucial Aspects’, in *Hermes in the Academy: Ten Years’ Study of Western Esotericism at the University of Amsterdam*, ed. by Wouter J. Hanegraaff and Joyce Pijenburg (Leiden: Brill, 1999), pp. 59-74; *The Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture*, ed. by Bernice Rosenthal (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005); Randall Styers, *Making Magic: Religion, Magic and Science in the Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Corinna Treitel, *A Science for the Soul: Occultism and the Genesis of the German Modern* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University, 2004); Bradford Verter, *Dark Star Rising: The Emergence of Modern Occultism* (Princeton, NJ: unpublished PhD. Dissertation, 1997).

<sup>45</sup> Marco Pasi, ‘Modernity’, p. 59.

Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn (est. 1888): admittedly they were two amongst the most innovative occult establishments of their day, but hardly representative of ‘modern Western society and culture’ as a whole.<sup>46</sup> It must be said, in fairness, that Treitel, Harvey and Owen, for example, have been more careful in delimiting their field of research to particular countries and occult orders. While other authors have tried to provide a more balanced approach, albeit only through review articles, it is my intention to seek to strike a middle ground between the occultist seen as the epitome of irrationalism and that of the occultist depicted as the cutting edge progressive modern individual, by employing Reghini in the Italian milieu as a counter-example that may allow us to appreciate both sides of the coin, when researching occultism’s flowering in modern times.<sup>47</sup> If it is understandable to see why, amongst the debris left behind after the fall of the National-Socialist regime, theorists of the Frankfurt school saw that the enemy of rationality had to be found in occultism, in order to justify the theorem according to which all that stands against rationality must be irrational, and that all that is irrational must be condemned,<sup>48</sup> I find it harder to understand the opposite tendency to focus on the positivist, scientist as the only aspects of the occult in line with modernity’s traits, in contemporary scholarship. Of course, the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn is, without doubt, one of the most utilized structures employed to convince the reader of the compatibility of modernity with occultism amongst magicians. For example, Pasi writes about the ‘exceptional status that women enjoyed in these occultist organizations’,<sup>49</sup> and Owen too describes the freedom enjoyed by female initiates within the English order.<sup>50</sup> Without doubt, women in this specific order and in this specific country did enjoy a certain degree of freedom and equal rights. Yet William Wynn Westcott (1848-1925), cofounder of the Hermetic Order, and amongst the first to recognize the need to admit women in the higher echelons of the organization, still complained about women not cleaning the rooms of the Second

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

<sup>47</sup> The two articles which most influenced my reasoning on the topic of occultism and modernity are the review articles: Thomas Laqueur, ‘Why Margins Matter: Occultism and the Making of Modernity’, *Modern Intellectual History* 3:1 (2006), pp. 111-135; and John Wayne Monroe, ‘The Way We Believe Now: Modernity and the Occult’, *Magic, Ritual and Witchcraft* 2:1 (2007), pp. 68-78.

<sup>48</sup> See Arthur Versluis, ‘The New Inquisitions: Heretic Hunting and the Intellectual Origins of Modern Totalitarianism’, in *Theodor Adorno and the ‘Occult’* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 1-14.

<sup>49</sup> Pasi, ‘Modernity’, p.64.

<sup>50</sup> Owen, *Place*, p. 90. ‘As Dorothea Hunter, “Deo Date” of the Golden Dawn, later remarked, “the Order was my University”’.



Order quarters and Golden Dawn initiate Frederick Leigh Gardner (1857-1930) was reassured by the head of the Bradford lodge, that ‘no petticoat-government will do for us in any way’.<sup>51</sup>

In the very first pages of his work on neo-Martinist movements in modern France, *Beyond Enlightenment: Occultism and Politics in Modern France* (2005), David Allan Harvey makes a statement, which I find to be very convincing:

While [Helena Petrovna] Blavatsky’s Theosophical Society was the dominant influence over the occult subcultures that emerged in the United States, Britain, and Germany, neo-Martinism developed as a reaction to English speaking Theosophy, one that rejected many of the latter’s tenets in the name of doctrines and traditions native to France.<sup>52</sup>

Although Harvey never actually does compare the occultist circles in France to those abroad, his point is clear: what may be hailed as a social conquest of occultism in one country, or even of a single occultist order within a country, cannot be held to be true in another European nation. Just to use an example, what would the progressive female magicians of the Golden Dawn have thought of Julius Evola’s article ‘Woman as Thing’?<sup>53</sup> Or of his statement according to which ‘The absolute woman not only does not possess that “I”, but would not know what to do with it, she cannot even conceive it and its presence would act in an extremely disturbing matter when concerning every genuine manifestation of her deepest nature?’<sup>54</sup> What would they have made of his physical abuse towards Italy’s most prominent feminist activist Sibilla Aleramo (1876-1970), with whom he had had a brief love affair?<sup>55</sup> These are

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p.72 and 91.

<sup>52</sup> David Allen Harvey, *Beyond Enlightenment: Occultism and Politics in Modern France* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2005), p. 6.

<sup>53</sup> Julius Evola, ‘La Donna Come Cosa’, *Ignis* 1:1-2 (1925), pp. 13-14.

<sup>54</sup> ‘La donna assoluta non solo non possiede quell’Io, ma non saprebbe nemmeno che farsene, essa non sa nemmeno concepirlo e la sua presenza agirebbe in modo estremamente disturbatore presso a ogni genuina estrinsecazione della di lei più profonda natura’, Julius Evola, *La Metafisica del Sesso* (Rome: Mediterranee, 1996 [1958]), p.196.

<sup>55</sup> It is Evola who lies behind the fictional character of the shady Bruno Tellegra in Sibilla Aleramo’s biographical novel, *Amo Dunque Sono* (Milano: Mondadori, 1927): p. 145 ff. ‘Exiting the villa he asked me if we could walk some more along the deserted road that runs close to the gates. The year before I had begged him for the same thing and he had declined. “Let’s walk”, I replied. All of a sudden, in a patch of darkness, he grabbed me by the arm, and buried his fingers in my velvet hair. My hair, which I had cut short because he didn’t like it long. I moved away. But he grabbed my wrists, throwing his body onto mine, trying to kiss

but few examples within the restricted domain of the relationship between women's rights and occultism, but really do apply to other aspects of society at large, when confronting two enormously different countries such as the United Kingdom and Italy.

It is definitely not my intention to belittle the work of any of the contemporary authors who have previously tackled the interrelation between occultism and modernity. Alex Owen's theory of 'seeking the infinite in a newly psychologized but potentially divine self'<sup>56</sup> and Treitel's ideas on the diffusion of occultism within German society are fundamental landmarks in the field. Some occultist circles in the early twentieth century indeed possessed many characteristics that define their notion of modernity, but there is a whole range of occultists, lodges and orders, in Italy, Germany and France, for example, which do not fit into this dominating framework. To quote Laqueur in describing the Western occultist milieus:

But there is also something not modern in the whole story [...]. Certain early twentieth-century figures understood this explicitly. The self-proclaimed "traditionalism" of René Guénon, for example, exploited sources of precisely the same sort and grew from the same roots as the supposedly modernist movements of Owen and Treitel. It had its origins in nineteenth-century occult, was fuelled by Masonic Lodges, [...] and thought to save the West from its impoverished materialism.<sup>57</sup>

Maybe the use of the term *non-modern* by Laqueur is not entirely accurate, since, as I have argued before, even anti-modernists were a clear product of modernity, but, ill choice of the term aside, his point is nonetheless valid. In his groundbreaking work on

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me. Silent struggle against the dark trunk of a tree, and high up there, among the foliage, some star was dreaming. I bit his hands, I felt I had turned into a panther, with no hate, happy, I manage to free myself, triumphant. "You are strong. I did not believe you to be this strong", he muttered. He escorted me back to the hotel entrance. He will send me a copy of *Der Golem*, which you told me of. He will call me to know if I will stay or leave. The night swallowed him up again[...]. Never become like him! May you be safe from the curse within him! May you repeat to me that 'in my goodness is my strength, in my capacity to love, my glory'. See also Simone Caltabellotta, *Un'Amore degli Anni Venti: Storia Erotica e Magica di Sibilla Aleramo e Giulio Parise* (Milan: Adriano Salani, 2015).

<sup>56</sup> Owen, *Place*, p. 249.

<sup>57</sup> Laqueur, 'Margins', p.127.

race and Anthroposophy in Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, Peter Staudenmaier acknowledges the fact that both perspectives on occultism, the post-war cry for its irrationalism and its recent rehabilitating efforts by contemporary scholars, ‘reveal significant facets of the modern occult revival, and the contrasts between them indicate the historical work that still needs to be done towards a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon’.<sup>58</sup> It is exactly my aim to further the studies within this field, by examining a reactionary modern occultist movement. Therefore, I will not be arguing for a new occult dimension in contrast with those previously analyzed by other scholars, but will merely endeavour to fruitfully contribute to the discourse by covering its neglected facet.

Antimodernity, compared to its positivist counterpart, has been a neglected field of study in social sciences: still, in order to delineate ideas and values ascribed to Reghini and his coterie, a theoretical framework is necessary. Scholar Peter King provides just such a framework in his *The Antimodern Condition: An Argument Against Progress* (2014):<sup>59</sup> following King, I will be using the term antimodern and antimodernity without a hyphen. In this work, King describes four key elements to antimodernism, which, as we will see, seem to apply perfectly to Reghini, Armentano and the other members of the *Schola Italica*: firstly, we find the urge to focus on ‘accepted and habitual ways of acting and doing’: this factor is coupled with an interest to maintain such an outlook while at the same time embracing newer trends and vogues, in Reghini’s case. But it is nevertheless true that a rhythm of life, which rejected the frenzied mechanization and fast-paced life championed by the Futurists may definitely be found within Reghini. Secondly, the need for a common culture ‘which pre-dates us and will reach beyond us’, giving life within such culture a ‘significance that transcends our everyday concerns’. The third element, according to King’s four-fold division is the stress on the idea of transmission: the key concepts of such culture are to be passed from generation to generation in order to remain valid and resistant to change. A strong parallel may be made with the claims of the Italic tradition allegedly being handed down throughout the millennia, in an unbroken chain

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<sup>58</sup> Staudenmaier, *Occultism*, p. 10.

<sup>59</sup> Peter King, *The Antimodern Condition: An Argument Against Progress* (London: Ashgate, 2014); other works useful for this stance against modernity are David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989); Arthur Versluis, ‘Antimodernism’, *Telos* 132 (2006), pp. 96-130.

from Pythagoras to Reghini; finally, and this factor touches upon Reghini's political involvement, King argues for a government whose main aim is that of preserving 'institutions, traditions and practices that allow the common culture to thrive'.<sup>60</sup> Reghini's plan for an intellectual elite to initiate the masses into age old traditions through a Pagan state overseeing cultural development, is a fundamental thesis backed by the Florentine thinker, and will constitute the fulcrum of his 'mission'.

## 2.2. THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE FIELD OF WESTERN ESOTERICISM

A rigorous study of Western esotericism can be said to begin in the 1930s, in Italy, with the studies of Paul Oskar Kristeller on Marsilio Ficino and Lodovico Lazzarelli (1447-1500),<sup>61</sup> and with a different, more religionist approach in Ascona, Switzerland, thanks to meetings among scholars in what, from 1933 became known as the *Eranos* meetings.<sup>62</sup> The organization of these meetings derived by 'a willingness to take *myth and symbolism* seriously, and explore their relevance to history and modern culture'.<sup>63</sup> Among the most distinguished names of the participants of the *Eranos* meetings throughout the years, we find Jewish Kabbalah scholar Gershom Sholem, Islamicist and theorist of the *mundus imaginalis* Henri Corbin, future representative of the so-called Chicago school Mircea Eliade, and scholar of Western esotericism, Antoine Faivre. What characterized the subject matter of the papers presented during these meetings was a marked inclination towards occult traditions, which tended to be religionist in their approach. Many times the scholars did not distance themselves from the subject of their writings, resulting, at times, in open polemics against the dangers of historical reductionism.

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<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19.

<sup>61</sup> Paul Oskar Kristeller, *Supplementum Ficinianum: Marsilii Ficini Florentini Philosophi Platonici Opuscula Inedita et Dispersa Primum Collegit et ex Fontibus Plerumque Manuscriptis Edidit*, 2 vols, (Florence: Olschki, 1937); Paul Oskar Kristeller, 'Marsilio Ficino e Lodovico Lazzarelli: Contributo alla Diffusione delle Idee Ermetiche nel Rinascimento', *Annali della R. Scuola Normale Superiore di Pas, Lettere, Storia e Filosofia*, 2 (1938), pp. 237-262; see also Christopher S. Celenza, 'Paul Oskar Kristeller and the Hermetic Tradition', in *Kristeller Reconsidered: Essays on his Life and Scholarship*, ed. by John Monfasani (New York: Ithaca Press, 2006), pp. 71-80.

<sup>62</sup> For a comprehensive study on the Eranos meetings, see Hans Thomas Hakl, *Eranos, An Alternative Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century* (Durham: Acumen Press, 2013).

<sup>63</sup> Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy*, p. 278.

The real breakthrough in the academic study of hermetic and esoteric currents was to be achieved in 1964, the year of publication of Dame Frances Yates's (1899-1981) *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*:<sup>64</sup> in this book, which captured the imagination of many readers among the countercultural movements of the 1960s, Yates proposed her theory that the Florentine Renaissance had been made possible mainly because of the employment of magic and because of the revival of hermeticism, due to the translation of the *Corpus Hermeticum* made by Ficino at the court of the Medici family. The Hermetic Tradition of the Renaissance promoted by Yates, was characterized as

A tradition dominated by magic, personal religious experience, and the powers of imagination; [...] it reflected a confident, optimistic, forward-looking perspective that emphasized humanities' potential to operate on the world and create a better, more harmonious, more beautiful society.<sup>65</sup>

Yates's works, though appealing to the general public, present two main problems: firstly Dame Yates's concept of Hermetic Tradition is depicted as an almost autonomous undercurrent, in a constant struggle against both Christianity and the scientific worldview, simplifying complex interrelations in a manner that was deemed unacceptable by her contemporary Italian colleagues,<sup>66</sup> secondly, her writing betrays an idea of magic as a static, scientifically antiquated realm, which nevertheless provided the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries with the necessary tools for a scientific revolution and a modern idea of progress. Luckily, as Hanegraaff points out, we are no longer dependent on legitimizing the study of Western esotericism characterizing it as progressive: therefore even currents, such as the one analyzed by myself in this thesis, 'deserve serious attention whether they happen to be progressive or not'.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Frances A. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964); see also her following books: *The Art of Memory* (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 1966); *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972); *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979).

<sup>65</sup> Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy*, p. 327.

<sup>66</sup> Eugenio Garin, 'Divagazioni Ermetiche', *Rivista Critica di Storia della Filosofia* 31 (1979), pp. 462-466.

<sup>67</sup> Wouter J. Hanegraaff, 'Beyond the Yates Paradigm: the Study of Western Esotericism between Counterculture and new Complexity', *Aries* 1:1 (2001), pp. 5-37 [17].

In a recent review article on the introductory texts to Western esotericism available in 2013, Hanegraaff, making an analogy to the updating of computer software, refers to this initial part of the history of the study of such currents as ‘Western esotericism 1.0.’<sup>68</sup> The update, so to speak, to ‘Western esotericism 2.0’ was marked by two distinct phenomena which are still very relevant to contemporary scholars of Western esotericism: they are Antoine Faivre’s publication of his seminal study *L’Ésotérisme* in 1992, and a consequent shift towards an empirical approach to the subject-matter, away from the religionist approach of the *Eranos* meetings and the Chicago School and from the oversimplifying theories of Yates.<sup>69</sup> For the first time in the history of the academic field of Western esotericism, Faivre attempted to define esotericism as a domain of academic research. What he offered the reader in *L’Ésotérisme* is the definition of esotericism as a form of thought, characterized by the presence of four intrinsic qualities (correspondences; living nature; imagination; transmutation) and the possible presence of two non-intrinsic ones (practice of concordance; transmission).<sup>70</sup> Furthermore, the increasing preponderance posited on empiricism and critical historiography made it possible for ‘Western esotericism 2.0’ to begin to be accepted as a legitimate field of enquiry within academia, fuelling ever-increasing discussions on methodological and theoretical debates among the pioneering scholars of the field.<sup>71</sup>

The greater acceptance of Western esotericism as a valid subject of enquiry has brought some scholars in the field to scrutinize Western esotericism through theories and methods successful in the field of religious studies in general. The most significant example is the relatively recent use of discourse analysis within the field of Western

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<sup>68</sup> Wouter J. Hanegraaff, ‘Textbooks and Introductions to Western Esotericism’, *Religion*, (2012), pp. 1-23 [2].

<sup>69</sup> Antoine Faivre, *L’Ésotérisme* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1992).

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>71</sup> See, among the many papers devoted to theory and method, Wouter J. Hanegraaff, ‘On the Construction of Esoteric Traditions’, in *Western Esotericism and the Science of Religion*, ed. by Wouter J. Hanegraaff and Antoine Faivre (Leuven: Peeters, 1998); *ibid.*, ‘Beyond the Yates Paradigm: the Study of Western Esotericism between Counterculture and New Complexity’, *Aries* 1:1 (2001), pp. 5-37; Arthur Versluis, ‘What is Esoteric’, *Esoterica* 4 (2002), pp. 1-15; Kocku von Stuckrad, *Western Esotericism: A Brief History of Secret Knowledge*, trans. by Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke (London: Equinox Publishing, 2009 [2005]), pp. 1-12; Marco Pasi, ‘Il Problema della Definizione dell’Esoterismo: Analisi Critica e Proposte per la Ricerca Futura’, in *Forme e Correnti dell’Esoterismo Occidentale*, ed. by Alessandro Grossato (Milan: Medusa, 2008), pp. 205-228; Michael Bergunder, ‘What is Esotericism? Cultural Studies, Approaches and the Problem of Definition in Religious Studies’, *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion*, 22 (2010), pp. 9-36.

esotericism: Olav Hammer, in his *Claiming Knowledge: Strategies of Epistemology from Theosophy to the New Age* (2001), applies a scrupulous analysis to three different strategies of epistemology within movements such as Theosophy and the New Age: namely the appeal to tradition, to science and to experience. Another strong advocate of this approach to the field is Kocku von Stuckrad, whose most recent application of discourse analysis may be found in his *Locations of Knowledge in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (2010): in it the break from Faivre's definition of Western esotericism as a form of thought is definitive, and the author argues against the idea of 'Western esotericism [being] an objectively identifiable "tradition" or "coherent" system of thought and doctrine', that constitutes an academic field *per se*.<sup>72</sup> By steering away from the idea of a Christian-centric view of Europe, advocating for an integration of Islamic and Jewish narrative, von Stuckrad focuses on 'esoteric discourses' that end up blurring or transcending altogether the margins between the three religions of the book, thus, in my opinion, transforming his subject of enquiry from esotericism to a European history of religion, which includes many more topics than Western esotericism alone. This being the case, as Hanegraaff argues, all is reduced to 'an exclusivist and reductionist subtext that automatically devalues "contents and ideas" in favour of "structures", makes history subservient to theory, and ends up promoting discursive approaches as the *only* valid methodology in the study of religion, esoteric or otherwise', implicitly forcing the historian of Western esotericism into an inescapable *cul de sac*.<sup>73</sup>

At the beginning of the 3.0 phase of the study of Western esotericism, having overcome overt religionist agendas, as in the Chicago school, and being aware of the ever-evolving approaches to Western esotericism, including reductionist methodologies, it is my opinion that contemporary scholarship should simultaneously maintain an empirical approach to the study of the history of Western esotericism, while opening the scope of enquiry and embracing a multidisciplinary approach, which may increase the relevance of the field with respect to more established

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<sup>72</sup> Kocku von Stuckrad, *Locations of Knowledge in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2010), pp. x-xi. Also see idem, 'Discursive Study of Religion: From States of the Mind to Communication and Action', *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 15 (2003), pp. 255-271; idem., 'Reflections on the Limits of Reflection: an Invitation to the Discursive Study of Religion', *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion*, 22 (2010), pp.156-169.

<sup>73</sup> Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy*, p. 365.

disciplines and avoiding the possibility of the field itself to remain a niche area of study for few devoted enthusiasts.

### 2.3. TRADITION AND TRADITIONALISM

Since the Renaissance, the transmission of ancient traditions and their reception have been among the foremost problems tackled by magicians and mystics.<sup>74</sup> Prominent thinkers, such as Florentine theologian Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499) and *enfant prodige* philosopher Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494) both ‘tried to harmonise different ancient traditions’.<sup>75</sup> Fictional and historical figures of antiquity, such as Zoroaster, Hermes Trismegistus, Orpheus, Aglaophemus, Moses, Pythagoras and Plato were envisaged as being part of a chain of initiates, which had propagated a *prisca philosophia* (ancient, or primordial philosophy) deriving from a single *fons perennis* (eternal spring, or source).<sup>76</sup> To the existing material at disposal, Ficino argued for an addition of a *philosophia occulta* (occult philosophy) or *magia*, which strongly resounded with Trismegistus’s *Corpus Hermeticum* (II-III c. AD), the foundational collection of hermetic philosophy, while Pico tried to highlight the concordances of the ancient philosophy with the Jewish kabbalah.<sup>77</sup> It was the Vatican librarian Agostino Steuco (1497-1548), who in his *De Perenni Philosophia* (1540), who first introduced the notion of a progressive degradation of the human spirit: the *prisca philosophia*, handed down by God himself, which became more and more diluted and impure with each passage of transmission, a concept that would be further

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<sup>74</sup> The clearest and most persuasive work, in my opinion, on the concept of tradition and its central role in Western esotericism, from the Renaissance to modern times is Antoine Faivre, ‘Histoire de la Notion Moderne de Tradition dans ses rapports avec les courants ésotériques (XVe-XXe siècles)’, *Filiation et Emprunts, Aries Special Issue* (Milan/Paris: Archè/La Table d’Émeraude, 1999), pp. 4-47. Also by Faivre, *Theosophy, Imagination, Tradition* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), pp. 171-248, and *Esoterismo e Tradizione* (Torino: Elledici, 1999).

<sup>75</sup> ‘tentent de metre en consonance diverses traditions anciennes’, Antoine Faivre, ‘Histoire de la Notion Moderne’, p. 9.

<sup>76</sup> ‘hunc [...] perennem fontem’, quoted in Charles Schmitt’s article ‘Perennial Philosophy: Steuco to Leibniz’, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 27 (1966): pp. 505-532.

<sup>77</sup> For a comprehensive commentary on the *Corpus Hermeticum*, see Brian P. Copenhaver, *Hermetica: The Greek Corpus Hermeticum and the Latin Asclepius in a New English Translation, with Notes and Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Joscelyn Godwin, *The Golden Thread: The Ageless Wisdom of the Western Mystery Traditions* (Wheaton, IL: Quest Books, 2007); Yates, *Giordano Bruno*. For Pico’s Theses, see *Syncretism in the West: Pico’s 900 Theses (1486): The Evolution of Traditional Religious and Philosophical Systems*, ed. and trans. by S. A. Farmer (Tempe, AZ: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1998).



expounded on by twentieth-century traditionalist thinkers.<sup>78</sup> Far from being an interest limited to the early modern period, a search for a continuous and perennial source of wisdom was undertaken by intellectuals even after the Enlightenment: thus, terms such as ‘the primitive Tradition’ appeared in Louis-Claude de Saint-Martin’s writings (1743-1803), both in his *Des Erreurs et de la Vérité ou les Hommes Rappelés au Principe Universel de la Science (Of Errors and Truths, or Men Related to the Universal Principal of Science)* of 1775 and *Tableau Naturel des Rapports qui Unissent Dieu, l’Homme et l’Universe (A Natural Table of the Relationships which unite God, Man and the Universe)*, published in 1781;<sup>79</sup> Johann Friedrich Kleuker (1749-1827) published an exegesis of Saint-Martin’s work entitled *Magikon* (1784), in which Plato’s ideas and biblical narratives were suggested to be found in his addition to the list of great thinkers of Kabbalists and Christian theosophists, which represent his major contribution to the traditional discourse.<sup>80</sup> During the French occult revival of the nineteenth-century, a prominent occultist such as Eliphas Lévi (1810-1875), in his seminal *Dogme et Rituel de Haute Magie (Trancendental Magic, its Doctrine and Ritual, 1854-1856)* states as his major intention for the book, to discover ‘the great secrets of religion and of the primitive knowledge of the magicians and the unity of universal dogma’.<sup>81</sup> Faivre justifies this attempt to seek (a) transcendental secrets of religion and magic ‘in order to discover elements of legitimization for their [the occultists of the nineteenth century] crusade against rising materialism, which they deemed the teachings of the Churches insufficient to provide’.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Agostino Steuco, *De Perenni Philosophia* (New York: Johnson Reprint Corp., 1972); also see Ronald K. Delph, ‘Renovatio, Reformatio, and Humanist Ambition in Rome’, in *Heresy, Culture and Religion in Early Modern Religion*, ed. by Ronald K. Delph, Michelle M. Fontaine, and John Jeffries Martin (Kirksville, Mo: Truman State University Press, 2006), pp. 73-92.

<sup>79</sup> Louis-Claude de Saint-Martin, *Des Erreurs et de la Vérité ou les Hommes Rappelés au Principe Universel de la Science* (Edinburgh: np., 1775); *Tableau Naturel des Rapports qui Unissent Dieu, l’Homme et l’Universe* (Edinburgh: np. 1782).

<sup>80</sup> Johann Friedrich Kleuker, *Magikon oder das Geheime System einer Gesellschaft Unbekannter Philosophen* (Hannover: np. 1784).

<sup>81</sup> ‘La decouvérte des grand secrets de la religion et de la science primitive des mages et l’unité du dogme universel’, Eliphas Lévi, *Dogme et Rituel de Haute Magie* (Paris: Librairie Medical de Germer Ballière, 1856), p. xi.

<sup>82</sup> ‘c’est afin d’y trouver des éléments de légitimation de leur croisade contre le matérialisme montant, éléments que les enseignements des Églises leur paraissant insuffisants à fournir’, Antoine Faivre, ‘Histoire de la Notion Moderne’, p. 25.

At the dawn of the twentieth-century, with the ever increasing quickening of the rise of the traits of modernity, a perennialist current, placing Traditionalist beliefs at its core, was born. Scholars within the field of Western esotericism have debated whether or not to include this school of thought within the folds of their area of enquiry and while, as an academic concept, perennialism, or Traditionalism, has been deemed unfit because of its emic qualities,<sup>83</sup> nevertheless I tend to agree with Faivre, when he insists on *pérennialisme* as being part of the modern Western esoteric milieu, Traditionalism and occultist currents being in many ways intertwined.<sup>84</sup> In modern times, the term Perennialism and Traditionalism refer mainly to the thought-current initiated by René Guénon, and the two terms have been used interchangeably by scholars.<sup>85</sup> I shall be using the term capitalised when referring to a specific tradition, be that Reghini's Roman-Pagan one or Guénon's Sufi-Islamic blend. When referring to traditions in general, the term will not be capitalised. Guénon's ideas on Traditionalism have been ingeniously summarised by Mark Sedgwick in three distinct categories: firstly, there is a belief in a *philosophia perennis*, which, according to Guénon and following Steuco's idea, had degenerated and become almost inaccessible in the West. The first point brings us directly to the second, and most important from an occultist perspective: the idea of counter-initiation. Guénon, as Reghini in Italy, had been involved in several occult orders in his youth, in the

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<sup>83</sup> Wouter J. Hanegraaff, 'On the Construction of Esoteric Traditions', pp. 26-27.

<sup>84</sup> Antoine Faivre, 'Histoire de Notion Moderne', p. 31.

<sup>85</sup> Among Guénon's classic texts that form the basis for his Traditionalist ideas, see René Guénon, *Orient et Occident* (Paris: Payot, 1924); idem, *La Crise du Monde Moderne* (Paris: Bossard, 1927); idem, *Le Règne de la Quantité et les Signes des Temps* (Paris: Gallimard, 1945); idem, *Aperçus sur l'Initiation* (Paris: Éditions Traditionnelles, 1946); Two essential works on Guénon and the Traditionalist movement are Sedgwick, *Modern World* and the recent David Bisson, *René Guénon: Une Politique de l'Esprit* (Paris: Pierre-Guillaume de Roux, 2013). Where Sedgwick's text succeeds in delineating a complete picture of Traditionalism in the last century, with the only downside of a very scarce use of primary sources, Bisson's work focuses on Guénon alone, with a plethora of primary material being used, from published works, to articles and correspondence. On Traditionalism see William W. Quinn, *The Only Tradition* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997); Aldous Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy* (New York, Harper & Brothers, 1945); VVAA, *Politica Hermetica: Doctrine de la Race et Tradition 2* (1988); Jean Borella, *Esotérisme Guénonien et Mystère Chrétien* (Lausanne: L'Age d'Homme, 1997); Marco Pallis, *A Treasury of Traditional Wisdom: An Encyclopedia of Humankind's Spiritual Truth* (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2000); Huston Smith, *The World's Religions: Our Great Wisdom Traditions* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958); Jean-Pierre Laurant, *Guénon* (Paris: Éditions de l'Herne, 1985); idem, *René Guénon, Les Enjeux d'une Lecture* (Paris: Dervy, 2006); Antoine Compagnon, *Les Antimodernes. De Joseph de Maistre à Roland Barthes* (Paris: Gallimard, 2005), pp. 7-14.

attempt to rediscover the lost perennial philosophy. His two books *Le Théosophisme, Histoire d'une pseudo-religion* (Theosophy, History of a Pseudo-religion, 1921) and *L'Erreur Spirite* (*The Spiritist Fallacy*, 1923) denounced the degenerate nature of the teachings of the Theosophical Society and of the spiritualist movement, judging them as counter-initiatory, that is, guiding the initiate in a 180 degrees turn away from the goal of knowledge of a authentic, ancient tradition.<sup>86</sup> These two volumes are the fruits of Guénon's frequentation of the Parisian occultist milieu between 1906 and 1912, a period that almost coincided with Reghini's involvement in the Italian occultist scene (1898-1929). Extant correspondence between the two Traditionalist thinkers show that both were aware of what they perceived to be follies of youth, and, as I hope to demonstrate in the following chapters, Guénon was just as instrumental in inspiring Reghini with Traditionalist ideas as Reghini and his mentor Armentano were for Guénon.<sup>87</sup> The third point, the most important aspect of Traditionalism relating to the overall subject of this dissertation, is that of inversion. Inversion is 'seen as an all-pervasive characteristic of modernity. While all that really matters is in fact in decline, people foolishly suppose they see progress'.<sup>88</sup> By 1924, with the publication of *Orient et Occident*, Guénon seems to have lost all hope in finding a true initiatory access to the ancient wisdom in the West, and advocates an embracing of Oriental traditions. The West is not depicted as inherently lost, rather it is equated with modernity, while the East is identified with a land in which tradition is still available to the seeker.

But what were Traditional beliefs in the early twentieth century and what did Traditionalist thinkers such as Guénon and Reghini seek in a return to tradition? Sociologist Edward Shils gives a definition that I am inclined to agree with:

Traditional beliefs are deferential. They express an attitude of piety not only towards earthly authorities, towards the elders and ancestors but also

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<sup>86</sup> René Guénon, *Le Théosophisme, Histoire d'une pseudo-Religion* (Paris: Editions Traditionnelles, 1921); idem, *L'Erreur Spirite* (Paris: Editions Traditionnelles, 1923).

<sup>87</sup> For published correspondence between Guénon and Reghini, see René Guénon, 'La Corrispondenza di René Guénon con Arturo Reghini', in *Il Risveglio della Tradizione Occidentale*, ed. by Mariano Bizzarri (Rome: Atanòr, 2003), pp. 105-143.

<sup>88</sup> Sedgwick, *Modern World*, pp. 24-25.

to the invisible forces which control earthly life. Holy men and priests are prized by traditional attitudes as is the learning of sacred texts.<sup>89</sup>

Both Guénon and Reghini sought a higher metaphysical principle that would guide them through the dangers of modernity; both actually sought to create an intellectual élite, which would be the medium between the transcendent and the common people. But while Guénon looked East, finally converting to Islam and moving to Cairo for the rest of his life, Reghini was unshakable in his belief in the superiority of his autochthone traditions. He perceived Tradition to be intrinsically particularistic, paying constant allegiance to the ideas of lineage, ethnicity ‘and the cultural sublimations of primordial ties in linguistic communities and national societies’.<sup>90</sup> His idea of the need for an order as a metaphysical realm of existence, no doubt influenced by his Pythagorean studies, is summarised eloquently in some of Armentano’s anti-modern aphorisms, such as ‘where there is order, there can’t be progress’, or ‘in human matters, order is almost always threatened by disorder’, or finally ‘social disorder is a consequence of believing in progress and of the desire to become other than what we are.’<sup>91</sup> It is my hope, with these examples, to have made clear that Traditionalists saw in progress, scientific and social, the main enemy to fight, brought by modernity and that the tool to overcome the perceived disorder was Tradition itself, a return to the past in order to create an ordinate future.

#### 2.4. ROMAN TRADITIONALISM

Studies on the phenomenon of Roman Traditionalism have only recently begun to flourish, and this dissertation will be the first exhaustive depiction of its characters and traits in the english language.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Edward Shils, ‘Tradition’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History: Special Issue on Tradition and Modernity* 13:2 (1971), pp. 122-159 [137].

<sup>90</sup> Mark Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, p. 137.

<sup>91</sup> ‘La’ dove vi é ordine non vi puo’ essere progresso’; ‘Nelle cose umane l’ordine é quasi sempre insidiato dal disordine’, Il disordine sociale é una conseguenza della credenza nel progresso e del desiderio di voler divenire diversi da cio’ che siamo’, Amedeo Armentano, *Massime*, pp. 146-147.

<sup>92</sup> For sources in Italian, see Giorgio, *Roma* and Renato del Ponte, *Il Movimento Tradizionalista Romano nel 900* (Scandiano: SeaR, 1987).

In his break with Guénon, Reghini continued promoting his ideals for the resurgence of Roman Traditionalism, a national brand of ancient wisdom, which would reintegrate a state of order, in what he considered a country ravaged by modernity and spiritually ruled by Christianity, a religion he considered as a foreign anomaly in the Roman-Italian history. Author Piero di Vona has provided a definition of Roman Traditionalism, which I will refer to throughout the dissertation:

We will call this brand of traditionalism Roman, firstly because it depended on people, who wrote on journals that were published and circulated in Rome, and belonged to the cultural milieu of the capital, secondly because it was inspired by the pagan and Roman tradition, or at least it assumed that the idea of Rome was still alive and still had a function in our [the twentieth] century.<sup>93</sup>

Reghini saw in the reformation of Freemasonry, via traditional values to its alleged pristine state before being co-opted by foreign countries, as the only way in which Italy could be saved from its decaying status. To do so he recognised his role as the human agent, but was convinced of being backed by the primordial powers of the Roman Tradition: ‘above men and initiates stand the great fates which tower over the Gods themselves; and initiates can only aspire to recognise them and consciously and intelligently collaborate for their manifestation in the world of mortals’.<sup>94</sup> His mission, in his eyes, was backed by the forces which had made Rome great, and if he were to succeed, would make her great again in the future, concurrently with the first stirrings of the Fascist movement, which would aspire to create a new Roman empire, and could be seen looming on the horizon. Already in 1906, his relationship with dogmatic faith and scientific epistemology are very clearly expressed in one of his lectures at the *Biblioteca Filosofica*: ‘Dogmatic religion opposes this [Traditional]

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<sup>93</sup> ‘Questo tradizionalismo lo diremo Romano, sia perché fece capo a persone, che scrivevano su riviste che si pubblicavano e circolavano a Roma, ed appartenevano all’ambiente culturale della capitale, sia perché fu ispirato alla tradizione romana, o almeno partì dal presupposto che l’idea di Roma fosse ancora viva, e avesse ancora una funzione nel nostro secolo’, Piero di Vona, *Evola, Guénon, De Giorgio* (Borzano: SeaR, 1993), p. 219.

<sup>94</sup> ‘al disopra degli uomini e degli iniziati stanno i grandi fati che sovrastano anche gli Dei; e gli iniziati possono solo ambire a riconoscerli ed a collaborare consciamente e intelligentemente alla loro manifestazione nel mondo dei mortali’, in Arturo Reghini, ‘Libertà e Gerarchia’, quoted in Di Luca, *Reghini*, p. 77.

view in name of a higher revelation; and science too, so-called positive, takes a hostile view, demanding absolute monopoly of scientific enquiry, declaring as anti-scientific all researches which are not conducted with the means and criteria fashionable today'.<sup>95</sup> Much more will be written about Reghini's approach to metaphysical questions throughout the dissertation, and for the purpose of this introduction, this last quotation about the magical essence of Rome and its soil itself, which clearly implies ethnonationalist sentiments, may suffice: 'Language and race are not the causes of this metaphysical superiority, it appears to be linked to the nature of the place, to the soil, to the very air. Rome, Rome *caput mundi*, the eternal city, historically manifests itself as one of these magnetic regions of our earth'.<sup>96</sup>

In the journal *Ur*, which Reghini co-edited with Julius Evola and his disciple Giulio Parise, the ties between this group of occultists and an allegedly ancient form of Roman Tradition were made, if possible, even more clear: this Roman *traditio*, in a way similar to Jewish Kabbalah, was said to have been handed down through the centuries from master to student, in order to keep alive a pagan initiatic centre that would remain powerful and alive through two millennia of Christianity. In the Reghini-Guénon correspondence, although skeptical towards the idea of pursuing a Western tradition, Guénon agreed with Reghini of a 'possible persistence of a Western tradition'.<sup>97</sup> As shall be seen in chapter two in greater detail, the fascination with the glory of ancient Rome had captured, poets, painters, nationalists, politicians and occultists: the ground was certainly fertile for such ideas to be cultivated, and, within a closed circle, developed according to antimodern, elitist standards.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> 'La religione dommatica si oppone a questa ricerca in nome di una rivelazione superiore; ed anche la scienza, così detta positiva, vi si dimostra ostile, pretendendo al monopolio dell'indagine scientifica, e dichiarando anti-scientifiche tutte le indagini che non siano condotte con quei mezzi e criteri presentemente in auge', Arturo Reghini, 'Il Dominio dell'Anima', in *Paganesimo, Pitagorismo e Massoneria*, ed. by Gennaro d'Uva (Furnari: Società Editrice Mantinea, 1988), p. 3.

<sup>96</sup> 'Il linguaggio e la razza non sono le cause di questa superiorità metafisica, essa appare connaturata al luogo, al suolo, all'aria stessa. Roma, Roma caput mundi, la città eterna, si manifesta storicamente come una di queste regioni magnetiche della terra' in Arturo Reghini, 'Del Simbolismo e della Filologia in Rapporto alla Sapienza Metafisica', *Ultra August* (1914).

<sup>97</sup> Letter from Guénon to Reghini, 13 July 1924, Guénon collection.

<sup>98</sup> For an idea of the general climate concerning the idea of imperial Rome, see Giorgio, *Roma*, pp. 228-312; Christian Giudice, 'Rome was Rebuilt in a Play: Roggero Musmeci Ferrari Bravo and the Representation of *Rumon*', *Pomegranate: The International Journal of Pagan Studies* 14:2 (2012), pp. 212-232.

### 3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

#### 3.1. MULTIPLE MODERNITIES AND OCCULTISM

As I have hinted at repeatedly in the first two subchapters of this introduction, it is my opinion that the conditions for the development of occult milieus in different European countries were greatly varied, and inasmuch as no specific occult group in the south of Europe could bear similarities with the British occult scene, for example, it is my intention to embrace, on a wider level, S.N.Eisenstadt's theories on multiple modernities: according to Eisenstadt, and, as we shall see, to a number of other scholars, 'the notion of "multiple modernities" denotes a certain view of the contemporary world- indeed of the history and characteristics of the modern era- that goes against the views long present in scholarly and general discourse'.<sup>99</sup> The idea is that, while a very general pattern of modernity obviously did affect Europe between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in the social fabric of family life, the work environment and so on, the very ways through which modernity itself bubbled to the surface of society varied vastly, from the timing in which certain aspects would rise to the ideologies which would support or adverse these innovations. As Eisenstadt aptly notices, 'many of the movements that developed [...] articulated anti-Western or even anti-modern themes, yet all were distinctively modern. This was true [...] of the various nationalist or traditionalist movements that emerged in these societies from the middle of the nineteenth century until after World War II'.<sup>100</sup> Eisenstadt's theories, and those of his colleagues, mostly touch upon contemporary frictions between a generalised idea of Western modern traits being at odds with non-European cultures. It is quite simple to imagine, though, that as the author himself puts it, 'there was an inherent tension between the culture of modernity, the modern "rational"

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<sup>99</sup> S.N. Eisenstadt, 'Multiple Modernities', *Daedalus* 129:1 (2000), pp. 1-29; see also *The Origins and Diversity of the Axial-Age Civilizations*, ed. by S.N. Eisenstadt (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 1986); Alex Inkeles and David H. Smith, *Becoming Modern: Individual Change in Six Developing Countries* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974); Johann P. Arnason, 'The Theory of Modernity and the Problematic of Democracy', *Thesis Eleven* 26 (1990), pp. 20-46; *Education and Fascism: Political Identity and Social Education in Nazi Germany*, ed. by Heinz Sunker and Hans-Uwe Otto (London: Falmer Press, 1997).

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

model of the Enlightenment that emerged as hegemonic in certain periods and places and others construed as reflecting the more “authentic” cultural traditions of specific societies.<sup>101</sup> The adaptation of the idea of multiple modernities to the more circumscribed and specific field of different occult milieus is quite simple. While some countries, such as Great Britain, Germany or the Scandinavian nations, in general, can be considered as harbouring more progressive and modern occult communities, countries like Italy, Greece or Spain, for multiple reasons, were not as advanced, in many fields, as their Nordic counterparts, and thus at times symbolised those cultures reflecting ‘the more “authentic” cultural traditions’ of their land.<sup>102</sup> At the turn of the century, a comparison between a Central or North European country with Italy would have brought out all the differences between the modern countries and the more traditional ones: in 1921 industrialization was still in its infancy in Italy, and only one person out of one-thousand owned a car; life expectancy had slowly crept from 35 in 1881 to 50 in 1921; 69 people out of 100 were illiterate in 1871, when Italy was reunited, while the ratio had gone down to 48.5 at the turn of the century; when Mussolini took power in 1922, 52% of workers were employed in the agricultural sector, which for long after remained Italy’s main source of revenue; only 5% of women possessed a degree in 1900, and the right to vote was extended to them only in 1945.<sup>103</sup> It is therefore plausible to accept the theories of Eisenstadt or sociologist Volker H. Schmidt, when he writes that

Not only are there [...] several paths to modernity, but different historical trajectories and sociocultural backgrounds also give rise to highly distinct forms of modernity in different parts of the world. *In fact, even Europe, where it all began, exhibits a great deal of cultural and institutional diversity.*<sup>104</sup>

Volker goes on to explain that, as there are different accounts of modernities outside the Western hemisphere, there exist multiple modernities within the Western

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<sup>101</sup> S.N. Eisenstadt, ‘Multiple Modernities’, p. 12.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, p.10.

<sup>103</sup> ISTAT, ‘Italia in Cifre’, <[www.istat.it/files/2011/03/italia-in-cifre.pdf](http://www.istat.it/files/2011/03/italia-in-cifre.pdf)>, last accessed 10/5/2016. This survey, by Italy’s major center for statistics, was made public for the 150th anniversary of the Unification of Italy in 1861.

<sup>104</sup> Volker H. Schmidt, ‘Multiple Modernities or Varieties of Modernity?’, *Current Sociology* 54:1 (2006), pp. 77-97. Italics mine.



Hemisphere itself: ‘Thus, French modernity differs from German modernity differs from Scandinavian modernity differs from English modernity differs from American modernity and so on’.<sup>105</sup> Sociologist Björn Wittrock has suggested that the fact that Greece, Portugal and Spain only comparatively recently adopted a democratic political system sets their expressions of modernity light years away from those of the countries in Central and Northern Europe.<sup>106</sup>

Although I will not be continuously comparing the Italian esoteric milieu with that of other countries dealt with in previous research, I will use the theoretical framework provided by the ‘multiple modernities’ thesis in order to consider the flourishing of an antimodern expression of occultism in Italy at the turn of the century and well into the 1930s. This development, if we are to accept the theories posited by S.N. Eisenstadt *et alii* should not come as a surprise, and should enable my research to balance out the view of European occultism as a whole as progressive and, as it were, coincident to an idea of a homogenous modernity affecting the whole of Europe in the same way. Sociologist Ibrahim Kaya has suggested that ‘[t]otalising theories of modernity stem from the belief that modernity is driven by unilinear progress, absolute truths, the rational planning of ideal social orders and the standardization of knowledge and production’.<sup>107</sup> The necessity to take a step back and reassess the multiplicity of modernities is paramount, and this applies to parts of modernity, such as antimodern sentiments, which are obviously a product of their time and thus thoroughly modern. Therefore, by using this theoretical framework, I will argue that Reghini’s Traditionalist circle fits perfectly in such an analysis of modernity, and his focus on ancient Roman customs as the sole instruments with which to remodel the modern world, are at once modern, but unlike anything produced by Britain, Germany or the Nordic countries. The antimodern, I will strive to prove, is but a different side of the modern, even in the smaller field of Western esotericism, and it is my intention to use this framework in order to assess the exaggerated idea of occultism as an exclusively progressive force within modernity. As Raymond R. M. Lee has suggested:

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<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p.80.

<sup>106</sup> Björn Wittrock, ‘Modernity: One, None, or Many?’ *European Origins and Modernity as Global Condition*, *Daedalus* 129:1: pp. 31-60.

<sup>107</sup> Ibrahim Kaya, ‘Modernity, Openness, Interpretation: a Perspective of Multiple Modernities’, *Social Science Information* 43:1 (2004), pp. 35-57.

Each identity involved in this struggle is free to invoke traditions as essential to the reworking of modernity. The role of traditions in organising identity suggests that multiple modernities can be perceived as specific expressions of culture. It implies that the conditions under which modernity is reorganised and represented have symbolic value insofar as they come to encompass cultural meanings vital to identity needs.<sup>108</sup>

### 3.2. THE INVENTION OF SACRED TRADITIONS AND THE OCCULT

Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger's theory on the invention of traditions, of the creation of ad hoc myths tied to historical events in order to bolster the credibility of certain movements, is almost a corollary to the notions on the transmission of traditions, which I wish to employ during my dissertation.<sup>109</sup> James R. Lewis argues that, in a religious setting, traditions are invented and obtain legitimacy through the recreation of an ideal past, when Weberian charismatic leaders were still alive.<sup>110</sup> In Reghini's case this past was to be found during the lives of Pythagoras and of the first kings of Rome, and such magico-religious tradition, according to the representatives of the *Schola Italica*, had been handed down from generation to generation. Olav Hammer also argues that an emic historiography is often created in order to make the traditions more authentic and believable: thus, according to Hammer 'different movements vary in their wish or ability to counter the claims of historical-critical research. [...] The Esoteric Tradition is no exception'.<sup>111</sup> It may suffice, in this introductory chapter, to remember Reghini's presumed uninterrupted line of initiates, including Pythagoras (570 BC- 495 BC), king Numa, Dante Alighieri, Pomponius Leto (1428-1498), Giordano Bruno (1548-1600), Tommaso Campanella (1568-1639), Giuseppe Mazzini and Amedeo Armentano.

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<sup>108</sup> Raymond L.M. Lee, 'Reinventing Modernity: Reflexive Modernity vs Liquid Modernity vs Multiple Modernities' *European Journal of Social Theory* 9:3 (2006), pp. 355-368 [364].

<sup>109</sup> *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 1-14

<sup>110</sup> *The Invention of Sacred Tradition*, ed. by James R. Lewis and Olav Hammer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 10-12.

<sup>111</sup> Olav Hammer, *Claiming Knowledge: Strategies of Epistemology from Theosophy to the New Age* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), p. 69.

It is through these two theoretical frameworks, mainly the first, that I hope to shed more light on modernity and occultism, in general, and on Reghini's writings on Tradition and modernity, specifically.

#### 4. METHODOLOGY

Given the nature of the primary sources at my disposal, throughout my dissertation my main methodology will be that of content analysis, defined by Alan Bryman as being

[a]n approach to documents that emphasizes the role of the investigator in the construction of the meaning of and in texts. There is an emphasis on allowing categories to emerge out of data and on recognizing the significance for understanding the meaning of the context in which an item being analyzed (and the categories derived from it) appeared.<sup>112</sup>

This form of analysis would help me in a significantly better understanding and explanations of the major characteristics embedded within Reghini's text. The positive aspects of such approach are manifold: I would be able to document the changes within Reghini's attempts to make sense of the modern environment throughout his lifetime, while at the same time identifying patterns of similarities or discordances with other thinkers and movements of his time. Such a methodology would greatly increase my capability in better inserting Reghini and his group of followers in the society of his day.

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<sup>112</sup> Alan Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 542. See also G.S. Dy-Lacco and R.L. Piedmont, 'A content analysis of research in the social scientific study of religion from 1997 to 2001: where we have been and where we hope to go', *Research in the Social Study of Religion* 14 (2003), pp. 277-288; also Klaus H. Krippendorff, *Content Analysis: an Introduction to its Methodology* (London: Sage Books, 2004), and idem., 'Reliability in content analysis: some common misconceptions and recommendations', *Human Communication Research* 30:3 (2004), pp. 411-433.

In his *Textual Analysis* (2009), author Alan McKee distinguishes the responses one might have in making sense of texts in three broad categories: firstly, and more straightforwardly, he lists the realist response, which aims to simply describe one culture's reality, while dismissing other cultures as inherently wrong; secondly, he writes about the structuralist response, in which, according to the author, 'all these culture seem to be making sense of the world differently; but really, underneath, they have common structures'; the third mode of response proposed by McKee is the post-structuralist approach to texts, where every culture has its own sense-making mechanics, none being ultimately right or wrong: people from different cultures will just experience the world in a different manner.<sup>113</sup> And even within one national culture, according to the author, many subcultures will employ different sense-making strategies, thus impeding the possibility of a homogeneous study of wider cultural groups.<sup>114</sup> In his classic work *The Politics of Pictures in the Age of Popular Media* (1992), scholar John Hartley likens the recovery, analysis and use of texts by employing the useful metaphor of forensics. As Hartley himself points out:

The material reality [of texts] allows for the recovery and critical interpretation of discursive politics in an "empirical" form; [text] are neither scientific data nor historical documents but are, literally forensic evidence.<sup>115</sup>

My main aim will be that of corroborating my theory through the individuation of such texts and of the messages within the text, in order to single out emerging recurring themes or ideas regarding Reghini and his Roman Traditionalist subculture. The basic method is very much reminiscent of what communication theorist Harold Lasswell posed through his paradigmatic question: 'who says what to whom via what channel with what effect?'<sup>116</sup> The set of messages that I would like to single out are going to be a dominant theme of each chapter: examples could be the (sometimes apparent) clashes between the idea of avant-garde and Tradition; Christian religion

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<sup>113</sup> Alex McKee, *Textual Analysis* (London: Sage, 2009), p. 9.

<sup>114</sup> John Hartley, *The Politics of Pictures* (London: Routledge, 1992).

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29

<sup>116</sup> Harold D. Lasswell, *Power and Personality* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1949), p. 23.

and its rejection; nationalism and internationalism. All these major themes of the early twentieth century will be analysed from Reghini's extensive writings and through them I will be able to add to the wider picture, from the standpoint of religious studies, accurately delineate the smaller picture, the Italian esoteric milieu, and the fill in the gaps in the particular picture: Reghini's personal life.

One more issue remains to be addressed concerning methodology: in his 1995 article 'Empirical Method in the Study of Esotericism', Hanegraaff sought to create a middle ground between a religionist and a reductionist approach to religious studies, recommended by Robert Segal.<sup>117</sup> Hanegraaff's argument for the validity of a *tertium datur* lay in the inadequacy of utilising either existing methods for the study of religion, in general, and that of esotericism, in particular:<sup>118</sup> while the religionist approach postulates a meta-empirical realm of enquiry (much like the Traditionalist school discussed previously), at the same time the reductionist approach denies that very meta-empirical world *a priori*. It seems obvious that not everything that cannot be proven in an empirical manner does necessarily not exist. Hanegraaff therefore argues for a methodological agnosticism, as opposed to Peter Berger's methodological atheism, in the approach to religious/esoteric subjects. through which equal distance may be maintained between the two extreme perspectives. As Hanegraaff himself writes, 'if we are radically honest, we must admit that none of us has a clue about what is *really* going on around us (and especially *how* and for what reasons, it is going on.'<sup>119</sup>) Methodological agnosticism will allow me to avoid committing the mistake of assuming a religionist approach to a transcendental aspect

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<sup>117</sup> Wouter J. Hanegraaff, 'Empirical Method in the Study of Esotericism', *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 7:2 (1995), pp. 99-129. For Segal's stance, see Robert Segal, 'In Defence of Reductionism', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 51 (1983), pp.97-122. Also see Jan Pavloet, 'The Definers Defined: Traditions in the Definition of Religion', *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 2 (1990), pp. 180-212, and Thomas A. Idinopulos and Edward A. Yonan, *Religion and Reductionism: Essays on Eliade, Segal, and the Challenge of the Social Sciences in the Study of Religion* (Leiden: Brill, 1994).

<sup>118</sup> As already stated, Hanegraaff, arguably the foremost scholar in the field of Western esotericism, posits the subject within the wider domain of religious studies, as can be seen in idem, 'The Study of Western Esotericism: New Approaches to Christian and Secular Culture', in *New Approaches to the Study of Religion (Regional, Critical, Historical)*, Vol. 1, ed. by Peter Antes, Armin W. Geertz and Randi R. Warne (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2004), pp. 489-519; idem, 'The Birth of Esotericism from the Spirit of Protestantism', *Aries* 10:2 (2010), pp. 197-216.

<sup>119</sup> Hanegraaff, 'Empirical Method', p. 107.

of religion which was shared by Reghini and his companions, while at the same time appreciating and not running the risk of belittling their religious yearnings.

## 5. OVERVIEW OF THE DISSERTATION'S CHAPTERS

### 5.1. INTRODUCTION

### 5.2. THE ITALIAN OCCULT MILIEU AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY

In order to fully appreciate the changes brought forth by the re-elaboration of positivist epistemology and the influence on the Italian occultist milieu that irrationalist currents exerted, an introductory panorama of occultist manifestations at the end of the nineteenth century is fundamental. Many of the most important political figures who were involved in the unification of Italy were partial to occult practices: Freemasonry, in particular, appealed to Giuseppe Garibaldi, at one stage Grand Master of the Grand Orient of Italy; Camillo Benso, Count of Cavour (1810-1861) was an enthusiastic spiritualist, as was a prominent scientist Cesare Lombroso (1835-1909), founder of the Italian School of Positivist Criminology and, later in his life, a staunch supporter of Eusapia Palladino (1854-1918), without doubt the most famous medium in Italy. In the world of arts, Giosué Carducci (1835-1907) was a longstanding Freemason, and so was Carlo Collodi (1826-1890), author of what is considered to be one of Italy's finest initiatory novels: *Pinocchio*.<sup>120</sup> When the crisis of modernity reached Italy, occultism, as previously discussed, provided one way out of the Weberian cage of disenchantment, and it was in this climate that the young Reghini grew up. Therefore, after a brief outline of the *Risorgimento* phenomenon, which brought Italy's unification, I will analyse traits of nineteenth-century culture, which obviously inspired Reghini, seeping into the following century. Such traits may be found in the great influence that Spiritualism had among the *Risorgimento* élite. The chapter will be closed with an analysis of the nebulous occult milieu called by scholars 'the Neapolitan School', which allegedly represented the *fin de siècle* torchbearers of a perennial Roman Tradition, and had as its major exponents Domenico Bocchini (1775-1840), Giustiniano Lebano (1832-1910) and, obviously, Giuliano Kremmerz (1861-1930). Although sources on the Neapolitan schools are

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<sup>120</sup> Élemire Zolla, in his *Uscite dal Mondo* (Milano: Adelphi, 1992), wrote of *Pinocchio* as 'a literary miracle of an almost intolerable esoteric profundity'.

scant, it will be necessary to roughly sketch its history because of the great influence it would have on the neo-Pythagoreans and their idea of a *Schola Italica*

### 5.3. THE EARLY YEARS (1898-1910): AVANT-GARDE, THEOSOPHY AND MODERNITY

After a brief foray into the Reghini family history and the Florentine's thinker's early life, this chapter will charter Reghini's first experiences in the world of occultism, with his active role in the founding of the first Italian Theosophical center with Isabel Cooper-Oakley (1853/4-1914), his subsequent delusion with this foreign brand of occultism, and his first studies on the subject of Roman Tradition. The analysis of the broader Theosophical movement in Italy, in clear contrast with Amedeo Armentano's school of thought will prompt a wider discussion on Reghini's seemingly contradictory involvement with the artistic and cultural avant-gardes and his yearning for an older, pristine tradition. While being a prominent figure at the *Biblioteca Teosofica* in Florence and at the cultural *Caffè Giubbe Rosse*,<sup>121</sup> writing for Giovanni Papini's *Leonardo* and the futurist journal *Lacerba*, Reghini was nevertheless anchored to the idea of a Tradition, and yet yearning for a new form of spirituality. By treating the Florentine thinker's writings as studies on the interaction between Tradition and Avant-Garde, I will be able to scrutinize that shift of consciousness Alex Owen refers to, when writing: 'committed to a rationalised understanding of the irrational, involved with the elaboration of a worldview that claimed allegiance to much older religious and magical traditions, and caught up in some of the most avant-garde preoccupations of the day, *fin de siècle* occultism exemplified the spiritualized investments of modern disenchanted subjectivity'.<sup>122</sup> The chapter will begin with a portrayal of the Reghini family history, followed by a thorough analysis of the crisis of Positivism in Italy, and the subsequent rise of neo-Idealism. The birth of the Florentine avant-garde and Reghini's crucial role in it will be discussed, along with his involvement with literary journals and theosophical publications, which I will analyse extensively.

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<sup>121</sup> *Ritorno alle Giubbe Rosse*, ed. by Roberto Sestito (Ancona: Associazione Culturale Ignis, 2006).

<sup>122</sup> Alex Owen, *The Place of Enchantment*, p. 257.

#### 5.4. SCHOLA ITALICA AND THE RITO FILOSOFICO ITALIANO

Reghini's involvement with Freemasonry was constant between 1902 and 1925: the year in which masonic organizations were banned in Italy. It is within fringe Freemasonry that Reghini found fertile ground for his ideas concerning a reform of modern Freemasonry which invoked a return to origins, which this occultist considered to be Italian. Reghini's involvement with Eduardo Frosini (1879-?) will be documented, and the brief history of the *Rito Filosofico Italiano*,<sup>123</sup> created to convey the ideals of Roman Traditionalism, will be discussed in detail. Reghini's attempt to bring autochthone ideas and rites into fringe masonry will provide an effective means to widen the scope of the discourse of a Western Tradition opposed to the oriental vogue of the early 1900s.<sup>124</sup> Italy, as was the case of other European countries, witnessed an increased fascination with oriental philosophies and cultures. Amongst the most influential scholars who devoted their energies to the study of eastern cultures, many were also drawn to occultism: Leone Caetani (1869-1935), author of *Annali dell'Islam (Annals of Islam, 1905-1926)*, was very close to the Roman pagan movements in Rome; Giuseppe Tucci (1894- 1984), who began focusing on Eastern cultures by contributing to a Theosophical organization run by Decio Calvari; Julius Evola, who, as Thomas Hakl has rightly emphasised, was in contact with Sir John Woodroffe (1865-1936) and published the first Italian text on Tantra: *L'Uomo come Potenza (Man as Power, 1925)*. The theories of Traditional thinker René Guénon, which posited an uncorrupted *prisca sapientia* in the East, were also widespread, as were visits to Italy by Eastern philosophers such as Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895-1986) and Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941). While Theosophical and Anthroposophical circles were more open to foreign influence, Reghini and his followers saw this *oriental fashion* as the final attack of barbaric influences on the pristine tradition of the *Urbs Aeterna*. A resurgence of interest in the traditions of Ancient Rome was not privy to Reghini, though, as can be testified by Roggero Musmeci Ferrari Bravo (1866-1937) and his play *Rumon* (1929), and the diffusion of plays and novels

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<sup>123</sup> See Eduardo Frosini, *Massoneria Italiana e Tradizione Iniziatica* (Ancona: np, 1911); Roberto Sestito, *Storia del Rito Filosofico Italiano e dell'Ordine Orientale Antico e Primitivo* (Firenze: Libreria Chiari, 2003).

<sup>124</sup> Arturo Reghini, 'Campidoglio e Golgota', *Atanor* 1:5 (1924), p.14.



dedicated to Roman themes (viz. Ciro Alvi's *Incendio di Roma*). In this chapter I will also scrutinise Reghini's meeting with his master Armentano, the nature of his initiation, and their common forays in the world of Freemasonry. Space will be devoted to the concept of invented traditions, in this case the *Schola*, as a strategy of epistemology. The brief history of the Philosophical Rite will be discussed as the closest Reghini ever got to creating a Roman Traditionalist masonic order.

#### 5.5. THE GREAT WAR AND *IMPERIALISMO PAGANO* : A CLASH BETWEEN THE MODERN AND THE TRADITIONAL

Reghini's most popular article, *Imperialismo Pagano*, published in 1914 for the *rivista La Salamandra*, and republished in 1924 in *Atanòr* shall be scrutinised as the most effective and inspiring of Reghini's writings concerning Roman Traditionalism.

Prior to the First World War, nationalist sentiments, derived largely from ideals of the *Risorgimento*, had been conveyed into the formation of the *Associazione Nazionalisti Italiani* (Italian Nationalist Association) in 1910. Through the writings of Enrico Corradini (1865-1931) and Luigi Federzoni (1878-1967) nationalism acquired a vast amount of followers among the bourgeois, with its strong anti-socialist, anti-democratic and anti-parliamentary sentiments. The main aim of the nationalists was the creation of a monarchy that would enact an imperialist policy. But nationalist ideals also had space in the agenda of occult groups: Arturo Reghini and his closest followers, most of them greatly involved in avant-garde movements, were staunch supporters of Italian nationalism. The main reason for supporting a nationalist agenda went beyond political sympathies, though: Reghini believed that only through the conquest of lands, that had been originally part of the Italian peninsula during the Roman empire, the energies which had made Rome great in the past would be summoned again. Reghini, Armentano, Papini and Giulio Parise (1900-1970) all enlisted as volunteers for the purpose of being able to harness the occult powers of a re-unified Italy.

A large part of the chapter will be a textual analysis of Reghini's most influential article, *Imperialismo Pagano*: subjects of discussion will be manifold: the readers

of the article, the theories espoused therein, the idea of a *prisca sapientia Romana*, which could still bring Italy its past glory back. The bearers and transmitters of such knowledge will be described, and the meta-history created by Reghini in the article will be contextualised in its time and place of publication.

#### 5.6. FASCISM AND TRADITIONALISM, MODERNITY AND ANTIMODERNITY

With the rise of Fascist power in the 1920s, the State's attitude towards masonic or other secret societies exacerbated and in a memorable speech on the 21 June 1921, Benito Mussolini (1883-1945) declared that Fascism did not share Freemasonry's ideals, claiming that Freemasonry was a 'big windbreak behind which hide little men'.<sup>125</sup> In 1923 he declared that belonging to a lodge or occult order prevented a person from being a member of the Fascist party, while in 1925, with the Bodrero bill, Freemasonry was banned, many lodges being ransacked and destroyed. After a historical introduction in which I will describe Mussolini's rise to power and his march on Rome, I will use Roger Griffin's and Frank Kermode's theories in order to highlight the two sides of Fascism: the ultra-modern one and the Traditionalist aspect. The concept of social occult modernism, created by Griffin, will be expounded on and its functionality to my ideas of an antimodern approach to occultism in modern times will be assessed. Next, the idea of an Occult Fascism will be compared to that of Nazi Occultism, and I will discuss the pros and cons of holding the idea of the existence of an occult aspect to Fascism or not.

I will then argue how, throughout the 1910s, René Guénon's theories for the rise of an *élite intellectuelle* were taken into consideration by Reghini, Rocco Amedeo Armentano and the circle of associates close to them. Such an elite was to provide the esoteric and spiritual foundation on which to rebuild Western civilization, and the knowledge possessed by such an elite would have to remain the domain of few, illumined re-creators of Tradition. While the relationship between elitism and

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<sup>125</sup> Quoted in Renzo de Felice, *Benito Mussolini: Il Fascista: la Conquista del Potere (1921-1925)* (Turin: Einaudi, 1966), p. 145: 'Un grande paravento dietro cui si nascondono piccoli uomini'.

occultism is much looser in other countries, an analysis of Reghini's writings and those of the *Gruppo di Ur* would be pivotal in showing how a culture soon to be permeated by the concept of elitism, such as the Italian one in the 1920s and 1930s, would co-opt the very concept of elite in its esoteric expressions too. A thorough analysis of hitherto unpublished correspondence between Guénon and Reghini will close the chapter, and a mutual influence between the two Traditionalist thinkers will be highlighted: as will be seen, Reghini, in the 1920s, seems to have influenced Guénon's ideas on Traditionalism in the West, as can be seen by the Frenchman's writings on the journals edited by the Italian in the next chapter.

#### 5.7. THE UR GROUP AND THE END OF A DREAM (1925-1929)

Occultism has often been related to the concept of elitism. Both Adorno and Webb refer to a restricted number of individuals who embraced occult ideas in open defiance of Enlightenment ideals. While scholars such as Joscelyn Godwin, Corinna Treitel and Marco Pasi have done much to promote the idea of a democratization of occultism in the modern world, it is important to notice how, alongside more easily accessible societies such as the Theosophical and the Anthroposophical societies, elitist occult movements existed in Italy in the early twentieth century. Indeed the concept of *élite* itself was the subject of many debates amongst Italian occultists. These diatribes were often hosted on occult reviews, in which Reghini was one of the most active agitators. In 1924 Reghini founded his first *rivista* (journal), *Atanòr*, and would later involve the *haut monde* of occultism in his subsequent endeavours, *Ignis* and *Ur*. Out of the long list of contributors to these journals, one may cite René Guénon, Julius Evola, Giuliano Kremmerz (1861-1930), Aniceto Del Massa (1898-1975), Leone Caetani, Giovanni Antonio Colonna di Cesarò. *The Gruppo di Ur*,<sup>126</sup> was the most significant coterie combining an elitist aristocratism and occultism in 1920s Italy.

The ultimate blow to shatter Reghini's dream of Pagan Imperialism under the

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<sup>126</sup> See Renato del Ponte, *Evola e il magico Gruppo di Ur. Studi e Documenti per Servire alla Storia di Ur-Krur*, Borzano: SeaR, 1994) and Hans Thomas Hakl, 'Julius Evola and the UR Group'.

guide of Mussolini took place in 1929, when, with the Concordat, the Vatican State reacquired temporal power and was declared the official religion of the budding Fascist empire. The rift between Roman Traditionalists and the Catholic Church had been evident from the early years of the twentieth century. As Alex Owen has noticed in her study on modern British occultism, in the modern age ‘many of the most spiritually inclined no longer identified in any way with formal Christian observance, [and] turned instead to the heterodox spirituality of Occultism’.<sup>127</sup> If this were the case for Britain, studying the reaction to orthodox Christianity in Italy is even more revealing: Reghini’s attempt at a restoration of Roman pagan ideals is a striking example of how anti-Christian and anticlerical feelings permeated sections of the Italian occult milieu of the day. A return to the Roman Way to the gods could therefore be seen as an individual and subjective choice before the advancing crisis of religious institution, which still regarded itself as the omnipresent, only way of access to the divine.

#### 5.7. *SILENTIUM POST CLAMORES*: THE FINAL YEARS (1930-1946)

In 1929 Reghini abandoned Rome for what I argue are three important reasons: firstly, the end of his hopes for a pagan Renaissance had created great discomfort, and the idea of continuing operating in Rome was, in the light of socio-political developments, impractical; secondly, his mentor Armentano had long left Italy for Sao Paulo, Brazil, for reasons both political and economic, and many of Reghini’s remaining relationships had soured (most importantly his collaboration and friendship with Evola had ended abruptly); thirdly, Reghini was subject to the constant attention of the Fascist secret police OVRA. His ill-standing with the regime meant that his only hope of gaining an income was to teach in a private school, and this he did in Budrio, near Bologna, at the Q. Filopanti private institute, from 1937 to 1946, the year of his death. In his final years, great attention was paid by the occultist to Pythagorean mathematics. His interest in mathematics had been a constant throughout his life and he was often to be found alone, with an abacus, pen and paper,

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<sup>127</sup> Owen, *Place*, p. 266.

for, as Roberto Sestito notes in his biography, ‘it was through the science of numbers that he grasped some of those never-disclosed secrets of the ancient *Schola Italica*.<sup>128</sup>

## 5.8. CONCLUSION

A final section in which I will draw my conclusions will close the dissertation: in it I will pick up all the strands developed in the separate chapters and weave them into a coherent structure, attempting, in the first place, to describe a novel interaction between occultism and modernity in an Italian context, following the theory of multiple modernities, and in the second, to prove Reghini’s pivotal role in the history of Italian occultism, showing him to be a fundamental figure in the development of Traditionalist thought, Italian Freemasonry, occult reviews, the neo-Pagan tenets of the *Schola Italica* and mathematics.

## 5.9. APPENDIX: *IMPERIALISMO PAGANO*

A translation of Reghini’s seminal article into the English language will be presented as an appendix, in order to provide the reader with the complete text, thus aiding his understanding of the main tenets of the *Schola Italica*.

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<sup>128</sup> Sestito, *Figlio del Sole*, p. 242.

## CHAPTER 2:

### ***RISORGIMENTO* ITALY: OCCULTISM, POLITICS, THE RISE OF THE NATION STATE AND ROMAN TRADITIONALISM**

‘The Fatherland is the sign of the mission that God gave to you to realise among Humanity’.<sup>129</sup>

Giuseppe Mazzini

#### 1. SCOPE OF THE CHAPTER

The aim of this chapter is twofold: on the one hand it seeks to provide the reader with a basic understanding of the socio-political changes that would drastically reshape the Italian peninsula after the unification process which ended in 1871, with its cultural developments effectively giving birth to the intellectual and artistic milieus in which Reghini would grow in; on the other hand it seeks to trace the first developments of what later would be labelled as the Italian, or Roman, Tradition, which Reghini would strive to bring to prominence in the twentieth century. It is important, for the complete understanding of future chapters, to fully realise that Reghini’s ideas were not born in a vacuum, and that the nineteenth century had already formulated some of the key ideas, which would then blossom into Reghini’s brand of Traditionalism.

In order to achieve these goals, the chapter will be divided into four sections, which, in my opinion, correspond to the four most important factors of the Italian nineteenth-century history, in relation to Reghini’s cultural formation. Of course, there are many other aspects and consequences of the socio-political turmoil that affected the peninsula in the 1800s that could be considered, but for reasons of space and to avoid dispersion when focusing on the subject matter of the dissertation as a whole, these four points have been selected for their unique relevance: an outline of

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<sup>129</sup> Giuseppe Mazzini, *Dei Doveri dell’Uomo* (Milan: RCS Libri, 2010 [1860]), p. 72: ‘La Patria è il segno della missione che Dio v’ha dato da compiere nell’Umanità’.

the *Risorgimento*; the Roman Question; the Italian nineteenth-century occult milieu; the Neapolitan school.

Before the first section, dealing with traditional interpretations of the *Risorgimento* and the role of Freemasonry in the unification process, a short introduction will be constituted by a brief analysis of the *Risorgimento*, the movement that brought to Italy's independence in 1861 and granted the status of capital to Rome in 1871. The rise of the idea of a single nation will be analysed, as will the ideals created by the *Risorgimento*, ideals that were carried over into the twentieth century and represented a reference point for all those interested in an Italian renaissance that would look to the past for its future glory. The prime political figures of the period, such as Giuseppe Garibaldi and Giuseppe Mazzini will be scrutinised and their links and interaction with secret societies will be brought to the forefront. Reghini's idea that a reformed Freemasonry could bring about a new era for Italy was also born from Garibaldi and Mazzini, and the Florentine thinker often mentioned the two heroes of the *Risorgimento* in his writings.

The second section will be devoted to what has been called the Roman Question: the conquest of Rome in 1870 against the papal forces and the consequent segregation of Pope IX (1792-1878) within Vatican soil were the culmination of anti-Christian and anti-Papal sentiments, which had been bubbling in liberal and masonic circles since the beginning of the Independence Wars: both Garibaldi and Mazzini held the Vatican's conservative Catholicism in the lowest esteem, and my analysis will here only briefly touch upon the subject, which will be discussed more thoroughly in chapter 7.

A third section will be represented by a cursory glance at the occult milieu of nineteenth-century Italy, which in one way or another heavily influenced Reghini, whose forays into the milieus of Italian occultism began as early as 1896. Representatives of the higher echelons of society, such as criminologist Cesare Lombroso (1835-1909), head of state Camillo Benso Conte di Cavour (1810-1861) or politician Massimo d'Azeglio (1798-1866), will be treated as strong case points for the dissemination of occultism within in the Italian elite. After demonstrating the widespread presence of occultism in Italian society, the most marked manifestation of

the day, namely Spiritualism, will be discussed, briefly mapping out a who's who of the most famous occultists of the day. Furthermore, and this proved to be of great importance to Reghini, who could by a very early age read, write and speak in Italian, English, German and French, the influence of foreign occult movements and personalities in Italy will be assessed, briefly covering pivotal figures such as spiritualist Daniel Dunglas Home (1833-1886), who caused a sensation at an Italian spiritual gathering, with his then astonishing table rapping and spirit manifestation.

Finally, but possibly closest to the subject-matter of this thesis, in the fourth section, I will discuss what has been considered as the most accredited precursor of Reghini's Roman Traditionalism: the *Scuola Napoletana*, or Neapolitan School. Information about this occult cluster of masonic orders is scarce, but allegedly the *Scuola* was formed by a number of mysterious organizations with a clear affinity to Egyptian Freemasonry. Harkening back to the times of Raimondo di Sangro, prince of Sansevero (1710-1771), the *Scuola* had allegedly entrusted generation after generation of initiates with an autochthone brand of occult teachings, which traced the grandeur of Rome back to an Egypto-Tyrrhenian occult tradition. Its most important representatives, namely Domenico Bocchini, Giustiniano Lebano and Giuliano Kremmerz, the latter Reghini's contemporary, will be introduced to the reader, as will some of their writings, which will then be found to echo in Reghini's work in a strong way.

I will then conclude the chapter by weaving all of these distinct strands together and provide a solid summary that will introduce the reader to the more biographical chapters, which will follow.

## **2. A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE *RISORGIMENTO***

### **2.1. A BRIEF OUTLINE**

When writing about the Italian *Risorgimento* (literally Resurgence, or Resurrection), the two main questions that need to be answered, in order to aid the reader not too familiar with Italian history, are: what is the timeframe in which the *Risorgimento* occurred, and what do historians mean by this term? The first question has been



debated by many scholars, and the concurred conclusion is to fix the date for the beginning of the *Risorgimento* as the immediate aftermath of the Congress of Vienna, held in the Schoenbrunn Castle from November 1814 to June 1815, after the fall of Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821). During the Congress, it was decided that post-Napoleonic Italy would remain very much as it had been ‘since the sixteenth century, a plaything of the European Powers’.<sup>130</sup> What now is Italy was divided into five large states: Piedmont, Lombardy-Venetia, the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, The Papal States; and the Kingdom of the Two Sicilys, with Naples as a capital. The year of the end of the *Risorgimento* process has been more frequently debated: while it has been commonplace to choose 1861 as a key date, following Giuseppe Garibaldi’s conquest of the Two Sicilys, the annexation of Tuscany, Emilia, Marches and Umbria by Piedmont, as voted in the plebiscites of 1860-1, and the election of the first Italian Parliament in January of that year, other scholars have shifted the date to 1871, after Rome had been conquered by the army led by General Luigi Cadorna (1850-1928) and the ‘eternal city’ had been proclaimed capital of the country.<sup>131</sup> A third date, less popular, but, as we shall see, fundamental to Reghini and his associates, was 1918, the end of World War One, when the Italians had annexed the cities of Trento and Trieste, thus effectively completely concluding the process of unification.<sup>132</sup>

As to the what the *Risorgimento* actually represented, modern scholarship tends to reject the common idea, mostly still taught in Italian schools today, and fundamental to Reghini’s early twentieth-century understanding of history, that the *Risorgimento* was a movement that concerned small and circumscribed elites, led to independence by the determination of the four great personalities of the time: Camillo Benso Count of Cavour, King Vittorio Emanuele II (1820-1878), Giuseppe Garibaldi and Giuseppe Mazzini. The revisionism on this stock-description of the *Risorgimento* is too vast a subject to discuss in this chapter, and includes new interpretations of

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<sup>130</sup> Martin Clark, *The Italian Risorgimento*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2013), p. 19.

<sup>131</sup> See, Edgar Holt, *The Making of Italy 1815–1870*, (New York: Atheneum, 1971) and Lucy Riall, *Il Risorgimento: Storia e Interpretazioni* (Roma: Donzelli, 1997) for the alternative years suggested.

<sup>132</sup> From the website of the Ministry of Defence: ‘L’Unità d’Italia (1861-1918)’, [difesa.it, http://www.difesa.it/Content/150anniversario/Pagine/Unit%C3%A0dItalia.aspx](http://www.difesa.it/Content/150anniversario/Pagine/Unit%C3%A0dItalia.aspx) (accessed September 13 2016): ‘the process of unification continued with the third independence war (1866), the second of Garibaldi’s expeditions to Rome (1867) and the annexion of Rome (1870). With the first world war (1915-1918) the process of reunification which brought to contemporary Italy was concluded’.

economic, political, geographical and, most of all social, factors. What is important to stress, though, is that contemporary scholars such as Alberto Mario Banti, Paul Ginsborg Derek Beals and Gigi di Fiore, to mention a few, have convincingly argued that the idea of Italy was not, as famously described by Austrian diplomat Klement von Metternich (1773-1859), ‘a mere geographical expression’.<sup>133</sup> Rather than being a political and economic process supported by very few individuals, the Risorgimento has been more recently described as a larger movement than previously argued. It is true that Italy’s inhabitants in the nineteenth century were mostly illiterate, the rate of literacy barely reaching 2.5% and the number of local dialects being the main form of expression, but it is also equally true that:

in the context of a largely illiterate society [...], the number of people affiliated to sects [ie. Secret societies], of the rebels of ’20-21, the members of the Giovane Italia [Young Italy, Mazzini’s secret society in favour of Italy’s unification], of those who take to the piazzas or voluntarily go to war or fight with the regular army of the Kingdom of Sardinia or set-up hospitals or communication lines in 1848-9, who plot schemes of insurrection in the early Fifties, who fight as volunteers in 1859, 1860 and 1866, who go and vote during the plebiscites, who participate en masse to the funerals of Mazzini, of Vittorio Emanuele, of Garibaldi and others, is *absolutely impressive* [italics mine].<sup>134</sup>

In his numerous studies on the phenomenon of the *Risorgimento*, Banti treats this popular movement in the light of George Mosse’s study of German patriotic

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<sup>133</sup> Klement von Metternich, quoted in Clark, *Italian Risorgimento*, p. 4.

<sup>134</sup> Alberto Mario Banti and Paul Ginsborg, ‘Per una Nuova Storia del Risorgimento’, in *Storia d’Italia Gli Annali 22, Il Risorgimento*, ed. by Alberto Mario Banti and Paul Ginsborg (Turin: Giulio Einaudi Editore, 2007), pp. xxiii-xxiv: ‘Nel contesto di una società largamente analfabeta [...] il numero di affiliati alle sette, dei rivoltosi del ’20-’21, degli iscritti alla Giovane Italia, di coloro che scendono in piazza o partono volontari o guerreggiano nell’esercito regolare del Regno di Sardegna o organizzano ospedali o servizi di collegamento nel 1848-49, che tessono trame insurrezionali nei primi anni cinquanta, che si arruolano volontari nel 1859, nel 1860 e nel 1866, che vanno a votare ai plebisciti, che si affollano ai funerali di Mazzini, di Vittorio Emanuele, di Garibaldi e di altri ancora, è assolutamente imponente’.

nationalism:<sup>135</sup> he describes *Risorgimento* agitations as a manifestation of new politics, born from the French Revolution, which ‘conceptually, even before than factually, posits at the centre of the public arena the *people/nation*, as principal depository of sovereignty’.<sup>136</sup> As such, he formulates three main ideas, which to the scholars of German nationalism will appear familiar, as characteristic of the *Risorgimento* rhetoric that would spur the masses into action: the love for the fatherland; the sacralisation of heroes; and the concept of blood and soil, popularised by German romantics and nationalists as the *blut und boden* ideology.<sup>137</sup> With other wording, Banti proposes this tripartite Romantic ideal in other works: in ‘Per una Nuova Storia del Risorgimento’ (‘For a New History of the Risorgimento’, 2007), for example, he formulates the idea of profound figures, *figure profonde*, which he defines as ‘allegoric systems, narrative constellations, which incorporate a specific chart of values, offered as the fundamental one that gives meaning to the proposed conceptual system’, in this case the ideas behind the *Risorgimento* as a vast movement.<sup>138</sup> These three ideas are, love/honour/virtue (*amore/onore/virtu’*), sacrifice (*sacrificio*) and kinship (*parentela*). Of course, in most cases, the three are intricately intertwined, and it is not easy to find a speech, a poem, a melodrama or newspaper article that does not mix all three. It will therefore be more useful to find examples that range from the political arena of rhetoric, to poetry, to narrative in popular books in which the reader can find aspects of these profound figures.

On 25 March 1861, just months prior to his death, Cavour delivered one of his most famous speeches to the newly formed parliament in Turin: replete with nationalistic rhetoric, Cavour’s address touched upon the very themes, which had characterised the entire period of the *Risorgimento*: the love for the united fatherland

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<sup>135</sup> Alberto Mario Banti, *Nel nome dell'Italia. Il Risorgimento nelle Testimonianze, nei Documenti e nelle Immagini* (Bari: Laterza, 2010); idem, *Immagini della Nazione nell'Italia del Risorgimento*, ed. by Roberto Bizzocchi (Roma: Carocci, 2002); idem, *La Nazione del Risorgimento. Parentela, Santità ed Onore alle Origini dell'Italia Unita* (Turin: Einaudi, 2000); idem, *Il Risorgimento Italiano* (Bari: Laterza, 2004).

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xxiv: ‘conettualmente, ancor prima che fattualmente, pone al centro dell’arena pubblica il popolo/nazione, depositario principale della sovranità’.

<sup>137</sup> Alberto Mario Banti, *Sublime Patria Nostra: la Nazione Italiana dal Risorgimento al Fascismo* (Bari: Giuseppe Laterza e Figli, 2011), chapters 2,3,4.

<sup>138</sup> Alberto Mario Banti and Paul Ginsborg, ‘Per una Nuova Storia del Risorgimento’, p. xxviii. ‘delle immagini, dei sistemi allegorici, delle costellazioni narrative, che incorporano una tavola valoriale specifica, offerta come fondamentale che da senso al sistema concettuale proposto’.

and the need to conquest Rome and make it Italy's capital once again. From the minutes of the parliamentary session, it is easy to see that the speech was a triumph, uniting both left and right in its propositions: parenthesised comments from the audience can be found throughout the written copy of the speech, such as '(On the left: Good!), (Approval), (Applause) or (Laughter and signs of approval)'.<sup>139</sup> But what was the content of the talk, one of Cavour's most celebrated interventions in the newly created parliament? The rhetoric of the greatness of ancient Rome, which Reghini and Armentano would make great use of in the twentieth century, can already be found in 1861:

[A]ll the historical, intellectual, moral circumstances that must determine the conditions of the capital of a great country all converge in Rome. Rome is the only city, which does not only have memories of being a municipality; all of Rome's history, from the days of the Caesars to this very day is the history of a city whose importance extends infinitely beyond its territory, of a city, I mean, destined to be the capital of a great State.<sup>140</sup>

Later on, a more socio-political bent is given to the speech, when Cavour asserts that Rome must be taken at two conditions: firstly, that of forging an alliance with the French against the Austrians; secondly, that of reassuring the country, and the many numbers of catholics in the country, that a move of the capital to Rome would in no case represent an act of servitude towards the Vatican.<sup>141</sup> The rest of Cavour's talk deals with the Roman question, and how, as Italians, the population should be free to practise the Christian religion, even though the Kingdom of Italy was not ready to grant temporal power to Pius IX.

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<sup>139</sup> Conte Camillo di Cavour, *Discorsi Parlamentari Del Conte Camillo di Cavour Raccolti e Pubblicati per Ordine della Camera dei Deputati* (Rome: Eredi Botta, 1872), pp. 314-334: '(Alla sinistra: Bene!), (Approvazione), (Applausi), (Si ride e segni di Approvazione)'.  
<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 318: 'in Roma concorrono tutte le circostanze storiche, intellettuali, morali che devono determinare le condizioni di una capitale di un grande Stato . Rome è la sola città d'Italia che non abbia memorie esclusivamente municipali; tutta la storia di Roma dal tempo dei Cesari al giorno d'oggi è la storia di una città la cui importanza si estende aldilà del suo territorio, di una città, cioè, destinata ad essere la capitale di un grande Stato'.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 319.

Such sentiments, the love for the fatherland and for the ideals of the *Risorgimento*, was not confined to the parliamentary halls of Turin: they also seem to pervade popular literature, even long after the annexation of Rome and the reunification to Italy. Possibly the most noticeable example, which impressed examples of *Risorgimento* values in the mind of many young readers was Edmondo de Amicis's *Cuore* (1886), a book aimed at young children, replete with Risorgimental values and their celebration thereof.<sup>142</sup> The success of the book was so astounding, that three years after its first publication, the publishers, the Treves brothers, had put out the 100<sup>th</sup> reprint. The text follows the life of an elementary school class in Turin throughout the school year 1881-2, and confronts themes, such as the condition of southern Italians who had emigrated North in search for work; the teaching of civic virtues in the newly-formed Kingdom, including the love for the fatherland, heroism, charity and a stoic endurance of adversities. Interspersed between the diary entries of the protagonist, Enrico Bottini, we find *Risorgimento* stories regarding young children and their contribution to the Italian cause: these characters, whom excelled in virtue and heroic valour, such as *il piccolo scrivano fiorentino* (the little Florentine writer), *la piccola vedetta lombarda* (the little Lombard lookout) or *il piccolo tamburino sardo* (the little Sardinian tambourine), all represented examples of extreme bravery, endurance during war-time, and an example to follow for the young Bottini and his classmates.<sup>143</sup> The most striking example of a strict adherents to the value of the *Risorgimento*, though, may be found in Bottini's father's letter to his son, verging on the subject of the love with the fatherland: in it, the reader may find a sum of what it meant for adherents to the *Risorgimento* to be Italian:

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<sup>142</sup> Edmondo de Amicis, *Cuore* (Milano: Fratelli Treves, 1886). For more on the author, see Luigi Cepparrone, 'Patria e questione sociale nel primo De Amicis', in *Aspettando il Risorgimento. Atti del convegno*, ed. by S. Teucci (Florence: Cesati, 2010) pp. 109-132; Antonio Carrannante, 'De Amicis nella storia della scuola italiana', *Rivista di Studi Italiani* (2007), pp. 49-68.

<sup>143</sup> These sections of *Cuore* had captured the hearts and the imagination of early cinema directors, and in the early-twentieth century, when Reghini was in his twenties, early motion pictures such as *Il Piccolo Garibaldino* (*The Little Garibaldi Soldier*, 1909), directed by future Fascist Filoteo Alberini (1867-1937), also director of *La Presa di Roma* (*The Conquest of Rome*, 1909), helped keep the *Risorgimento* ideas alive in the new century. See Giovanna Lombardi: *Filoteo Alberini, L'Inventore del Cinema* (Rome: Arduino Sacco, 2008) and Sergio Toffetti e Mario Musumeci, *Da La presa di Roma a Il Piccolo Garibaldino* (Rome: Gangemi Editore, 2007).

I love Italy because my mother is Italian; because the blood that flows in my veins is Italian; because the soil in which are buried the dead whom my mother mourns and whom my father venerates is Italian; because the town in which I was born, the language that I speak, the books that educate me, because my brother, my sister, my comrades, the great people among whom I live, and the beautiful nature which surrounds me, and all that I see, that I love, that I study, that I admire, is Italian.<sup>144</sup>

Bottini's father ends his letter admonishing his son never to neglect his duty towards the fatherland: 'May I one day see you return in safety from a battle fought for her, [...] but if I should learn that you have preserved your life because you were concealed from death [...] I shall never be able to love you again, and I shall die with that dagger in my heart'.<sup>145</sup>

Similar sentiments are also felt in loftier literary expressions, such as poetry, and more modest entertainment, such as popular song. Alessandro Manzoni (1773-1827), author of the novel *I Promessi Sposi* (The Betrothed, 1827), was among the first to pen an ode spurring Piedmontese and Lombard forces to unite against the common enemy:<sup>146</sup> in his *1821*, published only in 1848, Manzoni writes, 'They swore: may it be that this wave never/ again may flow amongst two foreign banks:/ May there be no place where barriers will rise/ Between Italy and Italy, never!'<sup>147</sup> Giovanni Berchet (1783-1851), was another poet who embraced the patriotism of the *Risorgimento*

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<sup>144</sup> de Amicis, *Cuore*, p. 104: Io amo l'Italia perché mia madre è italiana, perché il sangue che mi scorre nelle vene è italiano perché è italiana la terra dove son sepolti i morti che mia madre piange e che mio padre venera, perché la città dove son nato, la lingua che parlo, i libri che m'educano, perché mio fratello, mia sorella, i miei compagni, e il grande popolo in mezzo a cui vivo, e la bella natura che mi circonda, e tutto ciò che vedo, che amo, che studio, che ammiro, è italiano'.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 105.

<sup>146</sup> The poems of the three authors that follow have been placed in the volume Associazione Amici Accademia dei Lincei, *Canti e Poesie per un'Italia Unita – 1821-1861*, ed. by Pierluigi Ridolfi, preface by Carlo Azeglio Ciampi (Rome: Accademia dei Lincei, 2011), and as such, the pages referring to the poems and songs chosen will refer to this booklet. For more on the figure of Manzoni, see Giorgio Bonfiglioli, *Manzoni, la Vita e le Opere* (Milan: Genio, 1949); Alberto Giordano, *Manzoni. La Vita il Pensiero i Testi Esemplari* (Milan: Accademia, 1973); Giuseppe Langella, *Manzoni e Altra Letteratura del Risorgimento* (Novara: Interlinea, 2005); Silvia M. Tatti, *Il Risorgimento dei Letterati* (Rome: Storia e Letteratura, 2011).

<sup>147</sup> Alessandro Manzoni, '1821', in Associazione, *Canti e Poesie*, pp. 13-17, vv. 5-8.

wholeheartedly.<sup>148</sup> His *All'Armi! All'Armi (To Arms! to Arms, 1830)* later became the hymn of Mazzini's *Giovane Italia* and represents one of the most rousing examples of *Risorgimento* poetry: the first verses sing,

Come on. Sons of Italy! Come on, at arms! [Be] brave!  
The soil here is ours: of our heritage  
The terrible barter of kings ends.  
A people divided in seven destinies,  
Broken in seven by seven borders,  
Melts into one, a serf no more.<sup>149</sup>

Teobaldo Ciconi (1824-1863), patriot, author, journalist and poet, penned some of the *Risorgimento*'s most recognisable lyrics, and in a very short time, they were adapted to music and achieved fame as popular songs:<sup>150</sup> his *Passa la Ronda (The Patrol Comes Around, 1848)* quickly became a soldiers' favourite, with its easy to memorise lyrics:

Hush, silence! Who's there?  
The patrol comes around. Hail the patrol:  
Long live Italy, freedom!  
We are the guards of the three colours,  
Green, the hope of our hearts,  
White, the faith we keep amongst us,  
Red, the wounds of our heroes!<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> For more on Giovanni Berchet, see Italo Bertelli, *L'itinerario umano e poetico di Giovanni Berchet* (Ghezzano: Giardini, 2005) and Alberto Cadioli, *Introduzione a Berchet* (Bari: Laterza, 1991).

<sup>149</sup> Giovanni Berchet, 'All'Armi! All'Armi', in *Canti e Poesie*, pp. 25-6, vv. 1-6: 'Su. Figli d'Italia! Su, in armi! Coraggio!/Il suolo qui è nostro: del nostro retaggio/ Il turpe mercato finisce pei re. Un popol diviso per sette destini,/ In sette spezzato da sette confini, Si fonde in un solo, piu' servo non è'.

<sup>150</sup> For songs and hymns of the *Risorgimento*, see Giangiacomo Palermo, *Inni e canti del Risorgimento* (Milan: Mondadori, 2012); Tersilla Gatto Chanu, *Canti Popolar del Vecchio Piemonte* (Rome: Newton Compton, 2007); Oreste Marcoaldi, *Canti Popolari Inediti Umbri, Liguri, Piceni, Piemontesi, Latini* (Genoa, Forni, 1997 [1855]).

<sup>151</sup> 'Zitti, silenzio! Chi passa là?/ Passa la ronda. Viva la ronda:/ Viva l'Italia, la libertà!/  
Siamo le guardie dai tre colori,/ Verde la speme dei nostri cori,/ Bianco, la fede stretta fra noi,/ Rosso, le piaghe dei nostri eroi'.

## 2.2. RISORGIMENTO AS ROMAN TRADITION AND THE ROLE OF FREEMASONRY IN THE UNIFICATION PROCESS

In his work on Roman Traditionalist strands in the *Risorgimento, Dell'Elmo di Scipio: Risorgimento, Storia d'Italia e Memoria di Roma (By Scipio's Helm: Risorgimento, Italian History and the Remembrance of Rome, 2012)*, author and Roman Traditionalist Sandro Consolato, following the footsteps of the ideas of the members of the *Schola Italica* seeks to demonstrate that 'the Italian Risorgimento was a spiritual and political event *indigenous* in its deep essence, and, *as such*, readable within the categories of the "World of Tradition" [...], and, in particular, of the Roman-Italic tradition'.<sup>152</sup> Even though it lays beyond the strict boundaries of an etic approach to the subject-matter, Consolato's work is key in making the reader familiar with ideas that successfully circulated in Reghini's group: these were ideas that would drastically shape the Florentine occultist's life pursuit and the choice of using an emic source as the subject of discussion is only dictated by the fact that by reading Consolato, the reader may more easily understand Reghini's patriotism and nationalism.<sup>153</sup> With this interpretative key, the nineteenth-century movement is seen as a product of the modern age (with the rise of the nation-states; the emancipation of a bourgeois class; the rampant secularization of religion and the seemingly unstoppable upsurge of positivist thought), but is an *aspirazione antica*, an ancient vocation, which just happened to take place in the modern era.<sup>154</sup> Consolato then proceeds to chronologically map the great figures of Italian thought who, throughout the centuries, allegedly wished for an Italian unification; again, the characters enunciated are the same that the reader will find in Reghini's 'Imperialismo Pagano': Dante Alighieri, the so-called father of Italian language, is of course among the very first to be considered, with his contemporary Francesco Petrarca (1304-1374) being praised even more, for abandoning the idea of

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<sup>152</sup> Sandro Consolato, *Dell'Elmo di Scipio: Risorgimento, Storia d'Italia e Memoria di Roma*, e-book (Rome: flower-ed, 2012), Chapter 1, Section 1, Paragraph 2: 'il Risorgimento italiano fu un fatto spirituale e politico *indigeno* nella sua essenza profonda, e, *come tale*, leggibile all'interno delle Categorie del "Mondo della Tradizione", [...] e, in particolare, della tradizione romano-italica'.

<sup>153</sup> For works from academics belonging to the Traditionalist school, see, for example, Sayed Nasr Hossein, *The Need for a Sacred Science* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993) and William W. Quinn Jr., *The Sacred Tradition* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1997).

<sup>154</sup> Sandro Consolato, *Dell'Elmo di Scipio*, Chapter 1, Section 1, Paragraph 3.



the link of Italian independence with that of the Holy Roman empire.<sup>155</sup> In his poem ‘Italia mia, perché ‘l parlar sia indarno’ (‘Oh my Italy, Though Speaking [of unity] is Fruitless’, 1344-45), Petrarca dreams of an united Italy, from the Alps to Sicily, but realises the impossibility of the task at hand in his day.<sup>156</sup> The following two characters linked to a unified nation and an Italian renaissance are old acquaintances of scholars of Western esotericism: the Calabrian theologian Tommaso Campanella and the Dominican mystic Giordano Bruno.<sup>157</sup> During the *Risorgimento* proper, one of the greatest advocates for a united Italy with Rome as its capital was Mazzini: ‘there aren’t five Italys, four Italys, three Italys. There is but one Italy. God, who creating her smiled upon her, gave her as boundaries the two most sublime barriers he ever set in Europe, symbols of eternal Strength and eternal Motion, the Alps and the Sea. Thrice accursed by you and those who come after you he who would assume to give her other boundaries’.<sup>158</sup> Mazzini’s influence on Reghini can never be overstated, as will be seen in his magnum opus ‘Imperialismo Pagano’: some of Mazzini’s writings seem to be almost memorised by Reghini, who would then reinterpret them according to his Traditionalist ideas: many cities perished on earth and all may in their turn perish, but Rome, by design of Providence, and realised by its people, is the Eternal City, like that to which the mission to divulge to the world the word of Unity was given’, wrote the leader of the *Giovane Italia*.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Among the scholarly secondary sources see Gian Mario Cazzaniga, ‘Dante Profeta dell’Unità d’Italia’, in *Storia d’Italia Annali 25 L’Esoterismo* (Turin, Einaudi, 2010), pp. 455-76; Stefano Salzani, *Luigi Valli e l’Esoterismo di Dante* (Verona: Il Cerchio, 2014); see especially Maria Pia Pozzato, ‘Due casi di interpretazione aberrante di Dante. Luigi Valli e i ‘Fedeli d’amore’ in *L’Ansia dell’Interpretazione* (Modena: Mucchi, 1989), pp.181-203; idem, *L’idea Deforme. Interpretazioni Esoteriche di Dante* (Milan: Bompiani, 1989). For primary sources on the treatment of Dante and the idea of him as an esoteric author, see René Guénon, *L’Ésotérisme de Dante* (Paris: Ch. Bosse Libraire, 1925); Luigi Valli, *Il Linguggio Segreto di Dante e i Fedeli d’Amore* (Milan: Luni, 1994); Luigi Valli, *L’Allegoria di Dante Secondo Pascoli* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1922); Luigi Valli, *La Chiave della Divina Commedia* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1929).

<sup>156</sup> Francesco Petrarca, ‘Italia Mia Perché ‘l Parlar sia Indarno’, in *Sonetti, Canzoni e Trionfi* (Firenze: Giovannantonio de Nicolini da Sabio, 1541), p. 89.

<sup>157</sup> For the standard work on the subject, Yates, *Giordano Bruno*.

<sup>158</sup> Quoted in Sandro Consolato, *Dell’Elmo di Scipio*, n.602 ‘Non vi sono cinque Italie, quattro Italie, tre Italie. Non vi é che un’Italia. Dio che, creandola, sorrise sovr’essa, le assegnò per confine le due più sublimi cose che ponesse in Europa, simboli dell’eterna Forza ed dell’eterno moto, l’Alpi e il Mare. Sia tre volte maledetto da voi e da quanti verranno dopo di voi qualunque presumesse di segnarle confini diversi’.

<sup>159</sup> Quoted in Gaetano Salvemini, *La politica estera dell’Italia (1871-1914)* (Turin: Barbera Editore, 1944), p. 214.

Of the second fundamental figure in the reunification of Italy, Giuseppe Garibaldi, literature abounds: his role as liberator of South American countries has made him a world-recognised hero. As Alessandro Colonna Walewski has proclaimed, ‘Garibaldi is a man capable triumphing in any feat’.<sup>160</sup> Upon his return to Italy, he was, along with Mazzini, one of the major figures of the *Risorgimento*. Garibaldi’s motto of *O Roma, o Morte!* (Either Rome, or Death!) symbolises the importance given by the leader of the redshirts to the conquest of the capital. Ippolito Nievo (1831-1861), author and one of Garibaldi’s most staunch supporters, wrote in his *Le Confessioni di un Italiano* (*The Confessions of an Italian*, 1867): ‘Rome is the gordian knot of our destinies, Rome is the grandiose and many-shaped symbol of our race, Rome is our ark of salvation, which with its light dissipates the fog of all the crooked and confused thoughts of the Italians’.<sup>161</sup> As formidable a leader Garibaldi was, it is in the light of his strong links with Freemasonry that his influence must be scrutinised.

### 2.3. FREEMASONRY IN ITALY IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY

The institutional history of Italian Freemasonry has a fixed date, upon which no scholar has argued: 20 December 1859.<sup>162</sup> In Turin, on the second floor of the building in *Via Stampatori* 18, seven masons met and decided to create ‘an Italian Grand Orient

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<sup>160</sup> ‘Garibaldi è un uomo capace di trionfare in qualsiasi impresa’, in Jacques Duprey, *Un fils de Napoléon dans les pays de la Plata au temps de Rosas* (Paris-Montevideo: Casa Barrero y Ramos, 1937), p. 164

<sup>161</sup> Ippolito Nievo, *Le Confessioni di un Italiano* (Turin: Einaudi, 1964 [1867]), p. 708, ‘Roma è il nodo gordiano dei nostri destini, Roma è il simbolo grandioso e multiforme della nostra schiatta, Roma è la nostra arca di salvazione, che colla sua luce snebba d’improvviso tutte le storte e confuse immaginazioni italiane’.

<sup>162</sup> It must be said that masonic bodies existed in Italy before this date: the affiliation to foreign obediences and the development of the Masonic bodies as we know them today, though, can be said to begin on the date provided. See especially Carlo Francovich, *Storia della Massoneria in Italia. I Liberi Muratori Italiani dalle Origini alla Rivoluzione Francese* (Milan: Ghibli, 2013). Texts on the relationship between Freemasonry and Risorgimento abound: see *Storia d'Italia. Annali*, vol. 21, *La Massoneria*, ed. by Gian Mario Cazzaniga (Torino: Einaudi, 2006); Aldo A. Mola, *Storia della Massoneria Italiana Dalle Origini ai Giorni Nostri* (Milano: Bompiani, 1992); *Fratelli d'Italia. Memoria del rapporto tra Massoneria e Risorgimento nel 150 anniversario dell'Unità d'Italia* (Foggia: Bastogi, 2011); Fulvio Conti, *Storia della Massoneria italiana. Dal Risorgimento al Fascismo* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2003).

under the name of Great Orient of *Ausonia*'.<sup>163</sup> After Napoleon's debacle, and the successive return to smaller duchies and kingdoms in 1816, Freemasonry had been banned by the rulers of the various states, who had viewed its subversive potential. This does not mean that other secret societies didn't thrive or have their weight in the political events of the first half of the nineteenth century: on the contrary, the *Carbonari* (Charcoal Burners) had been fundamental in some of the early uprisings of 1821 and 1831, in the Kingdom of Naples and the Papal States. *Carboneria* was a loosely organised group of secret societies, with a vague resemblance to Freemasonry, and most of the important figures of the *Risorgimento* have been positively linked to this movement.<sup>164</sup> Mazzini was a member as far back as 1827, when he was only 22, and Garibaldi was associated with what we can consider the first active element of revolt in the history of the *Risorgimento*.<sup>165</sup> As Sandro Consolato has noticed, patriot Santorre di Santa Rosa (1783-1825) was probably the first to write about the key role played by the *Carbonari* in the insurrections that took place in Piedmont, Veneto, Lombardy, the Papal States and the Kingdom of Naples: 'This revolution is the first made in Italy in many centuries, without the aid and the intervention of foreigners; it's the first to have shown two Italian peoples that replied to one another from the two extremities of the peninsula'.<sup>166</sup> Despite their attempts to revolt, the *Carbonari* were too removed from the average population, who, more often than not, did not join in the revolutionary actions, which were swiftly culled, with much bloodshed.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> From the minutes of the session, quoted in Augusto Comba, 'La Massoneria in Italia dal Risorgimento alla Grande Guerra', in *La Massoneria nella Storia d'Italia*, ed. by Aldo A. Mola (Rome: Atanòr, 1981), pp. 71-85 [71].

<sup>164</sup> For a more detailed account of the Carboneria, which does not constitute a topic of this chapter, see Pietro Seddio, *La Carboneria* (Rome: Montecovello, 2012); Giovanni Teresi, *Sui Moti Carbonari del 1820-21 in Italia* (Foggia: Bastogi, 2007); Mario Cazzaniga and Marco Marinucci, *Per una Storia della Carboneria dopo l'Unita' d'Italia* (Rome: Gaffi, 2014).

<sup>165</sup> Carlo Botta, *Storia d'Italia dal 1789 al 1814*, Vol. VI (Capolago: Tipografia Elvetica, 1833), 30-32. Franco della Peruta, *Mazzini e i Rivoluzionari Italiani: il Partito d'Azione, 1830-1845* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1974); Denis Mack Smith, *Mazzini* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1993); Antonio Desideri, *Storia e Storiografia*, Vol. 2 (Messina-Florence: Edizioni D'Anna, 1997); Indro Montanelli and Marco Nozza, *Giuseppe Garibaldi* (Turin: BUR, 2007).

<sup>166</sup> Quoted in Sandro Consolato, *Dell'Elmo di Scipio*, Chapter 6, Section 2, Paragraph 7: 'Questa rivoluzione è la prima che si sia fatta in Italia da molti secoli senza il soccorso e l'intervento degli stranieri; è la prima che abbia mostrato due popoli italiani che, dalle due estremità della penisola, rispondono l'uno all'altro'

<sup>167</sup> *La Carboneria. La Costituzione del Regno delle Due Sicilie*, ed. by Francesco Ingravalle (Salerno: Edizioni di Ar, 2011), pp. x-xiii

Some of the founding members of the newly formed *Ausonia* Lodge had had experiences with the *Carboneria* and other secret societies of a similar kind: Sisto Anfossi (nd.), doctor and revolutionary fighter, had been a member of the *Franchi Muratori* (Free Masons, est. 1825) and successively of *I Cavalieri della Libertà* (The Knights of Liberty, est. 1830-1), two societies with much in common with the *Carboneria*.<sup>168</sup> After the creation of the Italian state in 1861, the founders of the Italian Grand Orient (from now on G.O.I) preferred to assume a moderate position in the political arena of the day, succeeding in foiling the more democratic members from electing Garibaldi as Grand Master. The Cavourian Filippo Cordova (1811-1868), ex Minister of Agriculture and among the most conservative of the moderate wing of G.O.I. was elected instead.<sup>169</sup> In 1864, Garibaldi was assigned an Honorary Grand Master title, and the next head of G.O.I, was the left-wing member of parliament Francesco de Luca (1811-1875). As noticed by historian of Freemasonry Augusto Comba, ‘with 1865 and the movement of the capital to Florence, a thirty-year period begins, during which there will be a strong identification between that political sector (the left wing) and the leadership of Italian Freemasonry’.<sup>170</sup> Within this timeframe, the numbers of lodges throughout Italy increased exponentially. In 1860 a new Supreme Council of the Grand Orient was founded in Palermo, with the creation of the lodge *I Rigeneratori* (The Regenerators), lodge in which, incidentally, Reghini would be initiated in 1902. The reasons behind this sudden popularity of Freemasonry are obviously to be found in the newly-formed state, in which freedom of expression was more openly tolerated, but it is my opinion that it was the link with politics that proved to be Freemasonry’s fortune: many key ideas that were upheld within cultural and political circles of the 1850s and 1860s were identical to those that could be found in a lodge: political ideologies, sacralisation of politics and of the nation-state and the edification of a new country as one people, for example.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Mario Cervi and Indro Montanelli, *L’Italia del Risorgimento, 1831-1861* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1994), pp. 63-4.

<sup>169</sup> For a biography of Filippo Cordova, see his nephew Vincenzo Cordova, *I Discorsi Parlamentari e gli Scritti Editi ed Inediti Preceduti dai Ricordi della Sua Vita, per Vincenzo Cordova*, Vol. 1 (Rome: Edizioni del Senato, 1889).

<sup>170</sup> Comba, *Massoneria in Italia*, p. 72.

<sup>171</sup> See Jeffrey Tyssens, ‘Freemasonry and Nationalism’, in *Handbook of Freemasonry*, ed. by Henrik Bogdan and Jan A.M. Snoek (Leiden: Brill, 2014), pp. 461-72. For Reghini and the *I Rigeneratori* Lodge, see next chapter and di Luca, *Reghini*, p. 9-11. It must be said, and I will tackle the issue more incisively in chapter 4, that Freemasons were usually forbidden to bring

A *vexata quaestio*, which always seems to crop up when Freemasonry is analysed in relation to the *Risorgimento*, is the role that Freemasonry played in the unification of the country. Following Consolato's idea, who goes so far as calling it a 'plot theory', my idea is that we must focus on the historical data we possess, to be able to draw a sound conclusion. If there were only eight people in 1859 who wanted to start G.O.I, and a negligible number of 'irregular' masonic lodges scattered throughout Italy, and Freemasonry had been banned in all of the peninsula after the Congress of Vienna, we are left with the smaller secret societies and offshoots of the *Carboneria*, which had to operate under the constant threat of being disbanded, its members incarcerated or killed.<sup>172</sup> The identity between the new bourgeois class and members of Freemasonry had undermined the nation-states restored after Vienna, but after the failure of the revolts in 1820-1 and 1830-1, the new political climate excluded Freemasonry from any public activity. Freemasonry only seems to pick up in the 1860s, when most of Italy is unified, and the only state resisting annexation was the Vatican. But before then, there are simply no documents to support a thesis of a huge Masonic entity pulling the strings and deciding the fate of Italy. Ernesto Nathan (1848-1921), Grand Master of G.O.I at the turn of the century, had himself admitted that 'with the fall of the Napoleonic dominion, the age of maximum splendour for Freemasonry ended and, in part as a consequence of the rise of the *Carbonari* who were falsely equated with Freemasons, severe prohibitions were applied [...]. Freemasonry did not rise again until the middle of the nineteenth century', as will be better discussed in chapter 4 of the dissertation.<sup>173</sup>

### 3. POPE PIUS IX AND THE ROMAN QUESTION

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politics inside masonic lodges, and that this period of Italian history represents an exception to Anderson's *Constitutions*, which had laid the rules and regulation of masonic bodies.

<sup>172</sup> Silvio Pellico, *Le Mie Prigioni* (Florence: Adriano Salani Editore, 1832) is a striking first hand account of a member of the Carboneria arrested and incarcerated.

<sup>173</sup> Ernesto Nathan, 'Discorso Inaugurale a Palazzo Giustiniani', *Rivista Massonica* (1912), p. 287, 'con la caduta del dominio napoleonico ebbe fine anche questo periodo di sommo splendore della Libera Muratoria e, in parte come conseguenza dell'entrata in scena dei carbonari falsamente parificati ai liberi muratori, furono emesse severe proibizioni [...]. La massoneria non risorse che sulla metà del xix secolo'.

Before his death in 1861, Cavour had made clear the importance of the conquest of Rome and its annexation to the Kingdom of Italy, especially during the time of the newly formed government in March 1861, where he claimed that Rome ‘is the necessary capital of Italy, since without Rome being united to Italy as its capital, Italy could never have a stable position’.<sup>174</sup> In these decades, Italy witnessed the rise of a group that has been defined as Neo-guelph: according to historian Luigi Bulfiretti, ‘the Neo-guelphs are those who consider as a basic element of the national-political resurgence the pope, who should head an Italian confederation of princes [...] for the fight against the Turks and the foreigner troublesome to the Church’.<sup>175</sup> The Neo-guelphs, who had rallied around Vincenzo Gioberti (1801-1852) and the tenets of his *Del Primato Morale e Civile degli Italiani (Of the Moral and Civil Primacy of the Italians, 1845)*<sup>176</sup>, were more and more cornered by the other nationalist movements. This ever-growing consensus, through the propaganda of left-wing papers and in Piedmont, especially, rallied for the abolition of clerical orders, the introduction of civil marriage in the constitution, and the abolition of the first article of the Albertine statute, which declared Catholicism as ‘State-Religion’.<sup>177</sup> But what was it of Pius IX that so angered the citizens of the newly founded Reign of Italy? In 1868, two years before being held captive on Vatican soil, the Pope had issued a bull going by the name of *Non Expedit*, which forbade all Catholics to vote in elections or take an active political role in the Kingdom of Italy.<sup>178</sup> The government also proceeded to emanate laws which were grouped under the heading of *Liquidazione dell’Asse Ecclesiastico*, or *Liquidation of the Ecclesiastic Fund*, which, according to decree 3036 of 7 July 1866 and law 3848 of the following year, enforced the coerced closure of religious corporations and the sale of the goods acquired

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<sup>174</sup> Conte Camillo di Cavour, ‘Discorso alla Camera dei Deputati’, 27 March 1861, in Cavour, *Discorsi Parlamentari*, pp. 332-353 [334]: ‘è la necessaria capitale d’Italia, ché senza che Roma sia riunita all’Italia come sua capitale, l’Italia non potrebbe avere un assetto definitivo’.

<sup>175</sup> Luigi Bulferetti, *Antonio Rosmini nella Restaurazione* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1942), p. 113, ‘Neoguelphi sono coloro che ritengono elemento basilare del risorgimento politico nazionale il papa, il quale dovrebbe porsi alla testa di una confederazione italiana dei principi della penisola [...] per la lotta contro i Turchi o lo straniero molesto allo stato della Chiesa’.

<sup>176</sup> Vincenzo Gioberti, *Del Primato Morale e Civile degli Italiani*, 2 Vols. (Lausanne: S. Bonamici & Compagnia, 1845).

<sup>177</sup> Carlo Alberto di Savoia, ‘Statuto Albertino’, *Gazzetta Piemontese* 3 March (1848), p. 1.

<sup>178</sup> Pius IX, ‘Non Expedit’, *The Catholic Encyclopedia* 11 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1911) Last accessed 29 Jan. 2015 <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11098a.htm>>.

thereby.<sup>179</sup> During the inauguration of the new quarters of the very first masonic lodge in Italy, Turin's *Loggia Ausonia*, on 1 January 1860, Lodge Master Filippo Delpino (1779-1860) had said: 'Rome, once ruler of the world, then left for centuries tainted by many crimes, from the nefarious activities of its rulers, pastors in savage wolves' clothing, stretches its supplicant hands towards this blessed corner of Italy where, adored by his subjects, Vittorio Emanuele reigns [...]'.<sup>180</sup> The importance of the annexation of Rome to the Kingdom cannot be overstated enough: both in Reghini's day, because, as we shall see, only a unified Italy, in the eyes of Roman Traditionalists, could let loose the latent occult powers of the land, which would bring Italy to rule the world once more; but also in the years succeeding 1861, where nationalistic fervour and rampant anticlericalism made the conquest of Rome a priority. Rome, as we have seen in previous paragraphs, was a symbol, a rallying point around which many politicians and military leaders had constructed their fortunes. The general public and the more educated elites both saw Papacy as the final barrier between what were perceived as centuries of temporal despotism and a future of glory for the newly unified country. This topic will be dealt with more thoroughly in the second half of chapter 7.

#### 4. ITALY AND NINETEENTH-CENTURY OCCULTISM

In order to fully appreciate the importance of occultism in Italian society during the historical period analysed in this chapter, a cursory research into foreign forms of occult manifestation must be described and accounted for. The three most

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<sup>179</sup> Lucetta Scaraffia, 'Il contributo dei cattolici all'unificazione' in *I Cattolici che hanno fatto l'Italia*, ed. by Lucetta Scaraffia (Torino: Lindau, 2011), pp. 223-7; Giancarlo Rocca, *Istituti religiosi in Italia fra Otto e Novecento* in *Clero e Società nell'Italia contemporanea*, ed. by Mario Rosa (Bari, Laterza, 1992), pp. 231 ff.; Also see Angela Pellicciari, *L'Altro Risorgimento, Una Guerra di Religione Dimenticata* (Milan: Ares, 2011); idem, *Risorgimento Anticattolico: la Persecuzione della Chiesa nelle Memorie di Giacomo Margotti* (Casale Monferrato: Piemme, 2004).

<sup>180</sup> *Commemorazione del Fratello Filippo Delpino. 25 Settembre 1862. Discorsi dell'Oratore della Loggia Ausonia* (Turin: Marzorati, 1862), p. 8. 'Roma, già padrona del mondo, poscia rimasta per secoli contaminata da tanti delitti, dall'opera nefaria dei suoi padroni, in veste di pastor lupi rapaci, tende supplice le mani verso questo lembo di Italia ove regna, adorato dai suoi sudditi, Vittorio Emanuele II'. On the *Loggia Ausonia* and its foundation, see Pietro Buscalioni, *La Loggia Ausonia ed il Primo Grande Oriente Italiano* (Cosenza: Brenner Editore, 2001).

important strands of occult influence, which touched Italian society, in all of its strata, are Freemasonry, as we have already seen, Spiritualism, and Theosophy. Seeing that the Theosophical Society, which was to have a massive influence on the young Reghini, was only founded close to the end of the century, and that Reghini played a pivotal role in its expansion on Italian soil, I shall be discussing this phenomenon more thoroughly in the following chapter. Freemasonry, and all of its ties with the political turmoil of nineteenth-century Italy, has already been discussed to some degree and will be more thoroughly in chapter 4, so most of this subchapter will be primarily focused on Spiritualism, its history outside of Italy, its spread in Italian soil and the great interest it garnered amongst the higher social classes, as well as the lowest. As shall be seen, most of those whom we consider to be the primary actors in *Risorgimento*'s history shared a deep interest in the practices dictated by Spiritualist beliefs.

Before delving into the history of this phenomenon, it is important to provide a working definition of Spiritualism, not to mention its differences with Spiritism. While Spiritualism refers to the movement, which garnered interest in the United States at around the middle of the nineteenth century, before spreading to England and other European countries, Spiritism is represented by a corpus of doctrinal teachings defined by its founding figure, pedagogue and author Hippolyte Léon Denizard Rivail, better known by his 'channeled' druidic name Allan Kardec (1804-1869), who described Spiritism as 'science that deals with the nature, origin, and destiny of spirits, and their relation with the corporeal world.'<sup>181</sup> But in order to make chronological sense in the *mare magnum* of spirits, séances and dancing tables, we must start our narration from a small town in upstate New York, in 1848.

#### 4.1 THE ORIGINS AND SPREAD OF SPIRITUALISM

As occult historian James Webb wrote, at the very beginning of his first chapter of *The Flight from Reason: the Age of the Irrational*: '[t]he gods came down to earth

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<sup>181</sup> Allan Kardec, *What is Spiritism?* (Philadelphia: Allan Kardec Educational Society, 1999 [1859]), p. 6; Patrick Deveney, 'Spiritualism', in *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), pp.1074-1082 [1075].



again on 31 March 1848. [...] It was a small wooden cottage at Hydesville, Arcadia, near New York'.<sup>182</sup> Here the sisters Leah (1814-1890), Margaret, (1833-1893) and Kate Fox (1837-1892) claimed to have found a way to communicate with a spirit who made his presence known through 'rappings', or 'raps', on the walls and the ceiling.<sup>183</sup> Before two years had passed, the Fox sisters were performing in New York City, where they gave three séances in three days, for one and a half dollars per ticket.<sup>184</sup> Spiritualism became a sensation, and the Fox sisters, victims of their own success, were largely forgotten, until 1888, when a journalist offered Margaret the sum of \$ 1500 in order for her to expose her séances as a fraud. In front of a packed New York Academy, Margaret proceeded to uncover one of the biggest hoaxes of modern history. According to Amy Lehman, 'in 1888, the sisters confessed that they had faked the ghostly rapping which precipitated the age of spirit contact. They claimed to have produced knocking sounds by manipulating and cracking the joints in their feet and knees. For a while, they made money giving lectures about this "deathblow" to Spiritualism'.<sup>185</sup> But it was a story believers were not interested in. While the fame of the sisters had waned considerably, Spiritualism had spread across the United States, and the 'raps' were alternated by feats of automatic writing, states of trance in which the medium was overtaken by a spirit, who spoke through the human vessel it occupied. Musical mediums could make instruments float in mid air and play tunes, while others manifested ectoplasm, the residue substance left behind by manifesting spirits.<sup>186</sup> It was a matter of time before the Spiritualist craze would touch European shores: the continental countries had been long since fascinated by the magnetic experiments led by the likes of Franz Anton Mesmer (1734-1815) and his disciple Armand Chastenet (1751-1825), and with all their talk of latent powers and faculties laying within a hypnotised person, spiritualism certainly had the way

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<sup>182</sup> Webb, *Flight*, p.1.

<sup>183</sup> For a comprehensive history of the early developments of the Spiritualist movement, see Frank Podmore, *Modern Spiritualism: a History and a Criticism* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2011 [1902]); Amy Lehman, *Victorian Women and the Theatre of Trance: Mediums, Spiritualists and Mesmerists in Performance* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2009); Barbara Weisberg, *Talking to the Dead: Kate and Maggie Fox* (New York, HarperOne, 2004); David Chapin, *Exploring Other Worlds: Margaret Fox, Elisha Kent Kane, and the Antebellum Culture of Curiosity* (Amherst, MA: Massachusetts University Press, 2004); Alex Owen, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

<sup>184</sup> Deveney, 'Spiritualism', p. 1075.

<sup>185</sup> Lehman, *Victorian Women*, p. 87.

<sup>186</sup> Deveney, 'Spiritualism', p. 1076.

paved by such pre-existent phenomena.<sup>187</sup> To understand the magnitude of the omnipresence of Spiritualism, one must concur with Simona Cigliana, when she states:

It is very difficult, nowadays, to realise with full comprehension the intensity and the extension of the debate which took place in the XIX century, especially in the positivistic era, when a thirst for all things marvellous seemed to almost universally spread into all social strata, of the passion with which positivist science devoted itself to somnambulist women and turning tables, manifestations out of thin air and ectoplasms, alternating episodes of *pochade* with spectacular conversions, riding the wave of the so-called Hydesville phenomena.<sup>188</sup>

In 1852, the first American medium to set foot on European soil was Maria B. Hayden (1826-1883), who had discovered her mediumistic powers the year before, during a séance held by her husband.<sup>189</sup> The medium, who had been invited to take part in the séance at the Hayden's residence, was none other than an eighteen-year-old Daniel Dunglas Home (1833-1886), who would proceed to become one of the most controversial and popular mediums of his time. While Hayden's stay in England proved to be unsuccessful, her sojourn lasting but a year, Home's fortunes were to prove more enduring:<sup>190</sup> suffering of ill health, in his memoirs *Incidents in my Life*

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<sup>187</sup> For this aspect of Mesmerism, see John S. Haller Jr., *Swedenborg, Mesmer, and the Mind/Body Connection: The Roots of Complementary Medicine* (West Chester, PA: Swedenborg Foundation, 2010); Bertrand Méhéust, *Somnambulisme et Médiurnité* (Paris: Les Empêcheurs de Penser en Rond, 1999); Alan Gauld, *A History of Hypnotism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

<sup>188</sup> Simona Cigliana, 'Spiritismo e Parapsicologia nell'Età Positivistica', in *Storia d'Italia, Annali 25 Esoterismo*, p. 528, 'Certo è difficile, oggi, rendersi conto con piena cognizione dell'intensità e dell'estensione del dibattito che si svolse nel corso del XIX secolo, e in particolare in età positivistica, quando una sete di meraviglioso soprannaturale sembra quasi universalmente diffondersi in tutti i ceti sociali, della passione con la quale la scienza positivistica si dedicò a sonnambule e tavole giranti, ad apporti ed ectoplasmi, alternando episodi da *pochade* a spettacolari conversioni, sull'onda dei cosiddetti fenomeni di Hydesville'.

<sup>189</sup> For a sympathetic treatment of Ms. Hayden's case, see Augustus De Morgan's preface in Sophia Elizabeth de Morgan, *From Matter to Spirit: the Result of Ten Years' Experience in Spirit Manifestations. Intended as a Guide to Enquirers* (London: Longman and Green, 1863), pp. v-xlv.

<sup>190</sup> Home's séances are discussed by many academic experts on the topic. Some of the most important works are John Casey, *After Lives: A Guide to Heaven, Hell and Purgatory*

(1874), Home confessed that he did not expect to survive more than a month after his move to London. Against all odds, he was welcomed by a fervent spiritualist named William Cox (nd.), who took the man into his care and gave him free lodgings in his large hotel in 53-55 Jermyn Street.<sup>191</sup> Immediately, and within less than a month, Home had more clients attending his séances that he could have ever thought of, and was earning incredible amounts of money: ‘my time was fully occupied, notwithstanding my delicate health, in giving séances to anxious enquirers of all ranks and classes, from the peer to the artisan, including men of all the professions high in art, science and literature’.<sup>192</sup> Soon, Home was sought after in other countries, and his voyages brought him to France, Russia and Italy, where he contributed greatly to the flaring up of the Spiritualist mania.

In Italy the Spiritualist vogue bloomed slightly later, but from 1864 the *Annali di Spiritismo in Italia* (1864-1898), edited by Professor Vincenzo Scarpa (1835-1912) under the pseudonym of Niceforo Filalete, one time secretary of the Count of Cavour, provided the ever-increasing readership with ‘many mediumistic “communications”, and brief excerpts of dialogues with the “deceased”’.<sup>193</sup> Scarpa’s efforts were not limited to the publication of the *Annali*: in 1863 he published a translation of Allan Kardec’s classic *Le Spiritisme à sa plus Simple Expression* (*Spiritism at its most Simple Expression*), in whose preface Filalete informed the reader: ‘both in Paris and Lyon, the two biggest cities in France, it has been noticed that all workers, strong-hands and day labourers who consecrated themselves to spiritism soon abandoned the old guilty habits of carelessness and squandering, have become laborious and frugal, and live honourably trusting in God and in the certainty of a better life’.<sup>194</sup> Scarpa’s work was not merely limited to the occult: as Cigliana has noticed,

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(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Ruth Brandon, *The Spiritualists: The Passion for the Occult in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (New York, Alfred E. Knopf, 1983); especially the amazingly detailed Rupert Christiansen, ‘The Psychic Cloud: Yankee Spirit-Rappers’, in *The Victorian Visitors: Culture Shock in Nineteenth Century Britain* (New York: Grove/Atlantic, 2001), pp. 130-58.

<sup>191</sup> Daniel Dunglas Home, *Incidents in my Life* (New York: A. K. Butts, 1872), p. 96.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97.

<sup>193</sup> Carlos Alvarado, Massimo Biondi and Wim Kramer, ‘Historical Notes on Psychic Phenomena in Specialised Journals’, *European Journal of Parapsychology* 21:1 (2006), pp. 58-87.

<sup>194</sup> Allan Kardec, *Lo Spiritismo alla sua piu’ Semplice Espressione. Esposizione Sommaria dell’Insegnamento degli Spiriti e delle Manifestazioni Loro*, pref. and trans. by Vincenzo Scarpa (Turin: Degiorgis and Ferneux, 1863), p. 4, ‘Tanto in Parigi come in Lione, le due più

The ‘Annals of Spiritism’, were [...] the periodical of the heroic years of spiritism in Italy [...]. [S]piritism covered an important role, along with Freemasonry, in upholding the spiritual needs of the progressive party, anticlerical and lay, favouring, also as a consequence of the Holy Seat’s uncompromising attitude on the subject of temporal power, the heading of religious aspirations towards a transcendent horizon not bound to the Holy See.<sup>195</sup>

Since the late 1850s Italy witnessed a marked increase in the number of societies and clubs constituted around mediums: Turin was probably still the most exciting city in terms of variety in which Spiritualists and Spiritists manifested their beliefs. In 1856 the vice-president of the House of Parliament Gaetano de Marchi (1792-1868), a number of experts and rich landowners founded one of the very first societies on Italian soil. Once this group was dissolved, the *Società Torinese di Studi Spiritici* (Turin Society for Spiritist Studies) was founded in 1863, with Scarpa as a member and Enrico Dalmazzo (nd.) as an allegedly talented medium and future editor of the *Annali*.<sup>196</sup> Soon, the Turin society was joined by the *Società Spirituale* (Spiritual Society) in Naples, the *Società Spiritica* (Spiritic Society) in Palermo, the *Società di Scordia* (Society of Scordia) based in the Sicilian town by the same name, and the famous *Società Spiritica*, in Florence, run by patriot and author Felice Scifoni (1802-1883).<sup>197</sup>

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popolose città della Francia, si è constatato che tutti gli operai, i braccianti e altri lavoratori alla giornata che si sono consacrati alla spiritismo hanno ben presto abbandonato le antiche colpevoli abitudini di imprevidenza e di scialacquo, sono divenuti laboriosi ed economi, e vivono onoratamente confidando in Dio e nella certezza di una vita migliore’.

<sup>195</sup> Simona Cigliana, ‘Spiritismo e Psicologia’, p. 534, ‘Gli “Annali dello Spiritismo” furono [...] il periodico degli anni eroici dello spiritismo in Italia. [...] Lo spiritismo ebbe una parte importante nel sostenere, insieme alla massoneria, i bisogni spirituali del partito progressista, anticlericale e laico, favorendo, anche in conseguenza delle posizioni intransigent assunte dalla Sante Sede, in materia di sovranità popolare, l’indirizzarsi delle aspirazioni religiose verso un orizzonte trascendente non legato alla Chiesa’.

<sup>196</sup> The best volume on the Turin spiritist scene is still Enrico Imoda, *Fotografie di Fantasmì: Contributo Sperimentale alla Costatazione dei Fenomeni Mediativi con Prefazione del Dott. Prof. Carlo Richet e Numerose Fotografie Stampate dalle Negative Originali* (Turin: Bocca, 1912).

<sup>197</sup> For a list of the most prominent groups in Italy, see Massimo Biondi, *Tavoli e Medium: Storia dello Spiritismo in Italia* (Rome: Gremese Editore, 1988), pp. 34-5.

#### 4.2. SPIRITUALISM AND SPIRITISM AMONG THE *RISORGIMENTO* ELITE

As can be seen by Scarpa's comment on the working class, the lower strata of society were intrigued by séances and spirit manifestation, but it would be a mistake to limit the area of influence to the working class alone. Working class aside, well-read bourgeois representatives, such as scientists, professors, artists, even the higher echelons of Italian society were swept away by the spiritualist craze. And just by judging the reigning house of Savoy in Piedmont, the list of active participants in séances is surprising: King Umberto I (1844-1900) and his wife Margherita of Savoy (1851-1926) had their first experience with a rapping table as guests in Naples;<sup>198</sup> Umberto's father, Vittorio Emanuele II was considered to be a 'convinced spiritualist'.<sup>199</sup> It is among the intellectual elite, though, that the medianic vogue involved its most influential adepts: Massimo d'Azeglio (1798-1866), author and Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Sardinia before Cavour, was very touched by the alleged revelation of spirits. After a brief but fundamental foray into the world of politics, d'Azeglio chose to retire and spend his days in isolation in Cannero, a small town by Lake Maggiore, from the summer of 1864 until his death. Biographers Giorgio Martellini and Maria Teresa Pichetto describe his new life in Cannero:

By a chance initiation from a non-descript 'Signor Romano', d'Azeglio becomes close, in the nocturnal silence of his small villa overlooking the Verbano [another name for Lake Maggiore], to the practices of spiritism. With the mysterious guest, with the painter Gaetano Ferri who lives nearby, and an anonymous damsel with great abilities with the piano, not to mention a medium with of rare sensibility, he spends entire evenings sat at the three-legged table, evoking otherworldly presences.<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> Biondi, *Tavoli e Medium*, p. 22.

<sup>199</sup> Cigliana, 'Spiritismo e Parapsicologia', p. 534.

<sup>200</sup> Giorgio Martellini and Maria Teresa Pichetto, *Massimo d'Azeglio* (Milan: Camunia, 1990), p. 276, 'Per casual iniziazione di un non meglio precisato "Signor Romano", d'Azeglio si avvicina, nel silenzio notturno della villetta sul Verbano, alle pratiche dello spiritismo. Con l'ospite misterioso, con il pittore Gaetano Ferri, che ha casa lì vicino, con una fanciulla ignota di splendido talento pianistico oltre che medium di rara sensibilità, trascorre serate intere al tavolino a tre gambe, evocando presenze ultraterrene'. On this period of d'Azeglio's life, also

D’Azeglio is not the only intellectual so involved in such practices: other major figures of the cultural milieu of the time include author Luigi Capuana (1839-1915), author of books such as *Spiritismo?* (1884) and *Mondo Occulto* (*Occult World*, 1896);<sup>201</sup> Antonio Fogazzaro (1842-1911), whose novel *Malombra* (1881) centres around a woman convinced of being a reincarnated spirit; and finally, members of the Milan literary movement of the *Scapigliatura*, a 1870s literary circle who were extremely enamoured of occult themes.<sup>202</sup>

What really stands out, though, in the age of positivism and empirical data as the ultimate proof for experiments dealing with séances is the conversion of some of the leading scientist of the day to the spiritualist cause. As for many other trends, positivism had reached Italy later than Northern European countries, and its tenets only peaked in Italian universities in the 1880s and 1890s.<sup>203</sup> For the sake of brevity I will be only dealing with the most famous case, which, I am sure, will aid the reader in comprehending the extraordinary influence which spiritualism exercised in nineteenth-century Italy’s scientific milieu. If one man were to be named, amongst those who most tried to adapt the positivist method, ‘abandon[ing] all metaphysical theories which had sustained science in years bygone, to bring back attention to the specific individuals, to their constitution, to their specific needs’, it certainly would be Cesare Lombroso.<sup>204</sup> Doctor, anthropologist, criminologist and full professor in legal medicine at Turin University, Lombroso was a pioneer in the studies of phrenology,

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see Georges Virlogeux, *Massimo d’Azeglio a Canneto* (Novara: Istituto per la Storia del Risorgimento Italiano, 1997).

<sup>201</sup> Luigi Capuana, *Spiritismo?* (Catania: Giannotta, 1884); idem, *Mondo Occulto* (Naples: Piero, 1896).

<sup>202</sup> See especially Iginio Ugo Tarchetti, *Racconti Fantastici* (Milan: Fratelli Treves, 1869), in which ‘I Fatali’, pp. 5-63 and ‘Uno Spirito in un Lampone’, pp. 116-41 stand out in their relation to spiritualist themes.

<sup>203</sup> For a more nuanced portrait of Positivism in Italy, Piero di Giovanni, *Filosofia e Psicologia nel Positivismo Italiano* (Bari: Laterza, 2006); Augusto Pusceddu, *La Sociologia Positivistica in Italia* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1989); *Cesare Lombroso. Gli scienziati e la nuova Italia*, ed. by Silvano Montaldo (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2011).

<sup>204</sup> The most comprehensive work on Lombroso’s private life, and his extracurricular activities is Delia Frigessi, *Cesare Lombroso* (Turin: Einaudi, 2003); works on Lombroso’s theories abound. See Daniele Velo Dalbrenta, *La Scienza Inquieta. Saggio sull’Antropologia Criminale di Cesare Lombroso* (Padova: CEDAM, 2004) and Emilia Musumeci, *Cesare Lombroso e le Neuroscienze: un Parricidio Mancato. Devianza, Libero Arbitrio, Imputabilità tra Antiche Chimere ed Inediti Scenari* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 2012).

physiognomic and social Darwinism.<sup>205</sup> His academic interest in medianic phenomena was dictated by his research in the field of hypnosis as a cure to hysteria. Yet, at this stage of his career, he denied any truth in theories of spirit interventions during séances or hysteria, which he disparagingly called ‘the spirits of the mirrors and armchairs’, and was extremely preoccupied by what he considered to be a regression from the findings of science: ‘remember that in this way we go back to the Totem, to the Fetish’.<sup>206</sup> In the 1890s, though, a semi-illiterate woman from Naples, Eusapia Palladino (1854-1918), was causing a furore as a result of her séances, which baffled even the most sceptical of attendees.<sup>207</sup> After having been invited by Palladino’s impresario to one of the lady’s séances, Lombroso’s whole view on positivism and spirit life was shattered: Lombroso, the positivist university professor, declared himself ‘ashamed and sorry to have fought with such tenacity the possibility of so-called spiritual facts [...]. I say facts because I am still opposed to the theory. But facts exist, and I take pride in being a slave to facts’.<sup>208</sup> How much Lombroso’s opinion counted in making men of science decide between Palladino’s status as a fraud or a genuine medium, and maybe even how much the crisis of positive science was beginning to surface in Italy, was highlighted by this event, which Massimo Biondi summarises eloquently:

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<sup>205</sup> Giorgio Colombo, *La Scienza Infelice. Il Museo di Antropologia Criminale di Cesare Lombroso* (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2000), p. 4.

<sup>206</sup> Cesare Lombroso, Enrico Ferri, Raffaele Garofalo and Giulio Fioretti, *Polemica in Difesa della Scuola Criminale Positiva* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1886); Cesare Lombroso, *Studi sull’Ipnotismo con Appendice Critica sullo Spiritismo* (Turin: Bocca, 1886), p. 67: ‘gli spiriti delle specchiere e delle poltrone’ and ‘ricordatevi che con ciò ritorniamo al Totem, al Feticcio’.

<sup>207</sup> The literature on Eusapia Palladino is vast: for a basic outlook on her life and séances, see Everard Feilding, W. W. Baggally and Hereward Carrington, ‘Report on a Series of Sittings with Eusapia Palladino’, *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* 23 (1909), pp. 309-569; Hereward Carrington, *Eusapia Palladino and her Phenomena* (New York: B.W. Dodge & Co., 1909); Enrico Morselli, *Psicologia e Spiritismo Impressioni e Note Critiche sui Fenomeni Medianici di Eusapia Palladino* (Turin: Bocca, 1908); for more recent works, see Simone Natale, *Supernatural Entertainments: Victorian Spiritualism and the Rise of Modern Media Culture* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2016); Christopher M. Moreman, *The Spiritualist Movement: Speaking with the Dead in America and around the World* (Westport, CT: Praeger 2013).

<sup>208</sup> Cesare Lombroso ‘Accettazione della Sfida’, in *Fanfulla della Domenica* 36 (sep. 1888), quoted in Cigliana, ‘Spiritismo e Parapsicologia’, p. 543: ‘vergognato e dolente d’aver combattuto con tanta tenacia la possibilità dei fatti considerati spiritici [...] dico dei fatti [...] perché alla teoria sono contrario. Ma i fatti esistono e io dei fatti mi vanto di essere schiavo’.

Within few years, among those interested in her [Eusapia Palladino], we'd encounter Charles Richet, the Parisian physiologist who was ALREADY interested in spiritual 'facts' and would go on to earn a Nobel prize in 1913 for his studies on immunology; Myers, Sidgwick, Barrett, meaning the group belonging to the English *Society for Psychic Research*; Wagner, professor of zoology in [S.] Petersburg [...]; Ochorowicz, professor of psychology and philosophy in Warsaw; the Curies and Flammarion; [...]. A semi-illiterate made the best names of European science and culture spin around her.<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> Biondi, *Tavoli e Medium*, p. 140: 'Entro pochi anni si sarebbero interessati a lei Charles Richet, il fisiologo Parigino che GIA' da tempo si occupava di fatti spiritici e si sarebbe meritato un Nobel nel 1913 per i suoi studi sui fenomeni immunitari; Myers, Sidgwick, Barrett, cioè il gruppo delle *Societa' per la Ricerca Psicica* inglese; Wagner, il professore di zoologia di Pietroburgo [...]; Ochorowicz, professore di filosofia e psicologia a Varsavia; i coniugi Curie e Flammarion; [...]. Una semi-analfabeta faceva ruotare attorno a sé i più bei nomi della scienza e della cultura europea'.





Palladino during a séance. © Society for Psychical Research

## 5. THE NAPLES SCHOOL AND THE OCCULT ITALO/ROMAN PRIMACY

The vast reservoir of myths and legends concerning the transmission of a *prisca sapientia italica* (ancient Italic wisdom) from the days predating ancient Roman monarchy, became a subject of great interest in the nineteenth century, and was represented in a literary strand, which was to influence *Risorgimento* culture greatly. The first author to put forth such a theory can be traced as early as the fifteenth century, as the brilliant research of Fabrizio Giorgio has evidenced in his two volume history on Roman Traditionalism *Roma Renovata Resurgat*:<sup>210</sup> the Dominican monk Annio da Viterbo (1437-1502) had written extensively on the pre-eminence of the Etruscan people, whose leader Noah-Janus-Vertumnus had led his people to a life of

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<sup>210</sup> Giorgio, *Roma Renovata Resurgat*, pp. 17-27.

humility and fraternity: ‘*Ergo Janus docuit humiles urbes et coetus et communionem politicam, non ad pompam et dominationis libidinem*’.<sup>211</sup> Other authors, through the centuries had picked up the thread left by Annius, and in 1710, Neapolitan philosopher Gianbattista Vico (1668-1744) had written his *De Antiquissima Italorum Sapientia ex Linguae Latinae Originibus Eruenda* (On the Most Ancient Wisdom of the Italians: Unearthed from the Origins of the Latin Language, 1710).<sup>212</sup> In it, he defends the antiquity of the Etruscan people’s sacred knowledge, which he dates as antecedent to that of the Greeks or the Egyptians, and mentions the hero of these narratives in a direct fashion: ‘I strongly insist on saying that Pythagoras did not bring his doctrine from Ionia to Italy’.<sup>213</sup> Such an interest in the Etruscan primacy in the Italian peninsula was rekindled in the nineteenth century, when a group of authors, which scholar Paolo Galiano has called ‘Tyrreno-Pelasgian’, picked up strands of the myth, posited the Pelasgian people as forebears of the Etruscans, and gave the narrative a nationalist twist, a detail vastly appreciated during the *Risorgimento*.

#### 5.1. THE METANARRATIVE OF PRIMACY: MAZZOLDI AND MENGOZZI

Among the *Risorgimento* retelling of the myths ascribing an ancient wisdom to Italian soil, the concordant elements that I have found among all are chiefly four: firstly, in primordial times, people inhabiting the Italian peninsula were imbued with some degree of divine wisdom, which gave them pre-eminence over neighbouring people: Italian primacy was therefore founded on sacred knowledge; secondly, this blessed race of human beings had witnessed what authors soon agreed to call *Cataclisma*

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<sup>211</sup> Riccardo Fubini, ‘Gli Storici nei Nascenti Stati Regionali d’Italia’, in idem, *Storiografia dell’Umanesimo in Italia da Leonardo Bruni ad Annio da Viterbo*, (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura 2003), pp. 3-38 (35): ‘Thus Janus led the humble cities and people and the political alliance, not to excess and lust of domination’; Also see Annius Viterbensis, *Antiquitatum variarum volumina XVII a venerando et sacrae theologiae et praedicatorii ordinis professore Ioanni Annio* (Paris: Josse Bade et Jean Petit, 1512); Roberto Weiss, ‘Traccia per una Biografia di Annio da Viterbo’, in *Italia Medioevale e Umanistica* 5 (1962), pp. 425–441; Giovanni Baffioni and Paola Mattiangeli, *Annio da Viterbo: Documenti e Ricerche* (Rome: Multigrafica Editrice per il Consiglio nazionale delle ricerche, 1981).

<sup>212</sup> Gianbattista Vico, *De Antiquissima Italorum Sapientia es Linguae Latinae Originibus Eruenda*, trans. by L.M. Palmer (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988 [1710]).

<sup>213</sup> Quoted in Paolo Galiano, *Roma Prima di Roma: Metastoria della Tradizione Italica* (Rome: Simmetria Edizioni, 2011), p. 45: ‘[a]rdisco asseveratamente dire che Pitagora non avesse di Ionia portato in Italia la sua dottrina’.

*Italico*, a cataclysm of seismic nature, which changed the face of the Italian landscape, with large masses of land being sunk by floods, and others rising from the sea as a result of earthquakes; thirdly, these people, which many nineteenth century authors identified as the Pelasgians, were forced to emigrate to Egypt and Greece, bringing with them only fragments of the ancient sacred lore, only to come back to the peninsula centuries later and settle in the centre of Italy, as the people we today identify as Etruscans; finally, the uniting figure of all these myths was Pythagoras, depicted as an Italian who had restored the sacred *mores* after the cataclysm. The first, and probably, most famous of the Tyrreno-Pelasgian authors is Angelo Mazzoldi (1802-1864)<sup>214</sup>: in his *Delle Origini Italiche (On Italic Origins)* of 1840, Mazzoldi put forth the theory of the first inhabitants of the Italian peninsula practicing monotheism and adoring ‘a single divinity, an arcane cause of the universe’.<sup>215</sup> Furthermore, he identified the civilization of ancient Italy with the Atlantean one that Plato (428 BC-348 BC) had described in his *Timaeus* (ca. 360 BC).<sup>216</sup> It is necessary to remind the reader that, while the *Risorgimento* was mainly a socio-political phenomenon, aspects of the sphere of the sacred were equally important to a smaller cultural elite. As Renato Del Ponte, one of the foremost representatives of modern-day Roman Traditionalism and one time disciple of Julius Evola, points out about the renewed value given to ancient sacred wisdom, ‘it was and remains an *indispensable* and *necessary* condition in order to go back to a geopolitical reality of Augustus’s (or Dante’s) Italy: hence, for a new manifestation in the *Saturnia tellus* of those divine powers which *ab origine* are tied to that geographic reality – consecrated from the will of the primordial Roman gods’.<sup>217</sup> As we have already seen, the *Risorgimento* wars had been given this sacral characteristic. What it would seem that Mazzoldi’s writings did was to provide a theoretical backdrop, which would justify such

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<sup>214</sup> See Angelo Mazzoldi, *Delle Origini Italiche e della Diffusione dell’Incivilimento Italiano all’Egitto, alla Fenicia, alla Grecia e a Tutte le Nazioni Asiatiche Poste sul Mediterraneo* (Milan: pp. 1840); Giorgio, *Roma*, pp. 26-39, Paolo Galiano, *Roma*, pp. 62-79; Paolo Casini, *Antica Sapienza*, pp. 269-72.

<sup>215</sup> Mazzoldi, *Delle Origini*, p. 140, ‘un’unica divinità, ossia un’arcana causa dell’universo’.

<sup>216</sup> See Plato, ‘Timaeus’, in Vol. IX of *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, trans. by W.R.M. Lamb (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968).

<sup>217</sup> del Ponte, *Movimento Tradizionalista*, p. 23: ‘era e rimane condizione *imprescindibile e necessaria* per ritornare alla realtà geopolitica augustea (e dantesca): quindi per propiziare il rimanifestarsi nella *Saturnia tellus* di quelle forze divine che *ab origine* a quella realtà geografica- consacrata dalla volontà degli dei indigeti- sono legate’.

enthusiasm and be used as a basis for the elaboration of other theories.<sup>218</sup> Benedetto Croce arguably the greatest Italian philosopher of the first half of the twentieth century and Nobel Prize candidate, remembers Mazzoldi's publication as being largely praised: 'Mazzoldi's book was generally greeted with respect and studied with seriousness'.<sup>219</sup>

The second author, whose works I will briefly analyse before moving onto the occult manifestations in Naples, and who claimed to work with these ancient energies, is Giovanni Ettore Mengozzi (1811-1882). Mengozzi, in 1860, soon after the Bourbons were expelled from Naples, founded an association for the study of medicine, philosophy and literature, which he named *Accademia Nazionale, la Scuola Italica*.<sup>220</sup> The aim of the society was to rid Italian culture from what were perceived as noxious foreign elements and create a new national philosophy based on what both Mazzoldi and Mengozzi (had) considered the most lofty of Italic philosophers: Pythagoras.<sup>221</sup> As the editing board of the journal *Roma Etrusca* wrote in their launch issue:

The Tyrrhenian Pythagoras, back from the Orient, initiated in those arcane doctrines, and having grasped the ancient knowledge of Etruscan Rome (promoted and nobly represented by Numa), decided to rekindle the Italian glory in philosophy, going to Kroton, where he knew a philosophical school existed, uncorrupted in the days that the Italian

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<sup>218</sup> Not all authors back this theory, though. If Sandro Consolato makes a very compelling argument in his three part essay 'Il Risorgimento Come Sviluppo della Storia Sacra di Roma', *Politica Romana* 4 (1997), pp. 125-175; 5 (1998-9), pp. 48-105; 6 (2004-5), pp. 109-168; Paolo Casini, in his *Antica Sapienza*, is much more dismissive of the sacred aspect of the *Risorgimento*: to him, Mazzoldi's work is a 'bizarre rhapsody', p. 269, and called Mazzoldi's lucubrations and the criteria followed 'unrefined and arbitrary', p. 270.

<sup>219</sup> Benedetto Croce, 'La Storiografia in Italia', *La Critica, Rivista di Letteratura Storia e Filosofia diretta da B. Croce* 13 (1915), p. 165-92 [178].

<sup>220</sup> On the life of Giovanni Mengozzi, philosopher, author and Italy's foremost expert in homeopathy, see Anonymous, 'Cenni Biografici del Comm. Prof. G. E. Mengozzi', *Roma Etrusca* 1:1 (1881), pp. 2-6; on the Scuola Italica founded by Mengozzi, see Giovanni Mengozzi, *La Scuola Italica, Scoieta' Nazionale Filosofica, Medica, Letteraria Residente in Napoli* (Napoli: np, 1865); Giorgio, *Roma*, pp. 17-82.

<sup>221</sup> The idea of Pythagoras as a Tyrrhenian and non-Greek philosopher was not a new one: Porphyry had claimed a Tyrrhenian origin for Pythagoras's father in *Pythagoras*, Diogenes Laertius and Clement of Alexandria all pointed out to this possibility. Thomas Aquinas too, and in the twentieth-century century Reghini and Armentano.

discovery was fought and corrupted in Greek Elea, and thus, for our Pythagoras, the best arena for his glory [was to be found] in Italy rather than elsewhere.<sup>222</sup>

The association experienced a resounding success, and many popular figures of the *Risorgimento* period were involved: King Vittorio Emanuele II granted the association the title of *Accademia Reale*, or Royal Academy, journalist and linguist Nicolò Tommaseo (1802-1874) and statesman Count Terenzio Mamiani della Rovere (1799-1885) were at one point respectively chairs of the philosophical and literary section of the Academy. Among the honorary members of the *Anziani Pitagorici*, Pythagorean Elders, figured naturalist and geologist Charles Darwin too (1802-1874).<sup>223</sup> Mengozzi also drew politicians and generals who had made the history of the *Rinascimento*: when he sponsored the creation of an *Alleanza Monoteistica*, or Monotheistic Alliance, in 1870, the aim was to limit papal power with a religious reform that could bring the Italians closer to the Etruscan sacred roots they had neglected for centuries.<sup>224</sup> Garibaldi himself, enthused by the idea of an antipapal movement, wrote to Mengozzi: ‘I completely adhere to Monotheism, whose aim is the cult of truth, the brotherhood of nations and the destruction in Italy and around the world of papacy, representative of ignorance and slavery’.<sup>225</sup> Other than Garibaldi, Mengozzi was also in touch with the Masonic milieu of Naples: he was himself a high-degree mason, and held an affiliation with the *Loggia Sebezia*, which, as we shall see, played a pivotal role in the development of an occult discourse related to the antiquity and primacy of the Italic people.<sup>226</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> La Direzione, ‘Nostro Programma’, *Roma Etrusca*, p. 1, ‘Il Tirreno Pitagora, reduce dall’Oriente, iniziato in quelle arcane dottrine, e raccolta l’avita sapienza della Roma Etrusca (da Numa altamente propugnata e nobilmente rappresentata) volle ravvivare l’italiana Gloria nella filosofia, recandosi in Crotona, dove sapeva esistere una scuola filosofica incorrotta nei giorni che nella greca Elea il Trovato Italico veniva combattuto e guastato, epperò pel nostro Pitagora, in Italia miglior campo di Gloria per lui che altrove’.

<sup>223</sup> See Giorgio, *Roma*, pp. 73-4.

<sup>224</sup> Anonymous, ‘Cenni Biografici’, p.4.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5, ‘Io aderisco pienamente al Monoteismo, la cui meta è il culto del vero, la fratellanza delle nazioni e la distruzione in Italia e nel mondo del papato, rappresentante dell’ignoranza e del servaggio’.

<sup>226</sup> The authors discussed in this paragraph may be the most significant when it comes to the theme I have engaged with, but there were definitely many others who added to a growing corpus of literature on Tyrreno-Pelasgian Italy: see Giuseppe Micali, *L’Italia Avanti il Dominio dei Romani*, 2 Vols. (Florence: np. 1810); Camillo Ravioli, *Spedizione Romana in Egitto* (Rome: Tipografia delle Belle Arti, 1870); Ignazio Ciampi, *La Città’ Etrusca* (Rome:

## 5.2. OCCULTISM IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY NAPLES

As has been hinted at, the origins of a distinctive Egyptian hermetic tradition in Italy have their roots in the Neapolitan masonic tradition,<sup>227</sup> of which the most noticeable examples can be noted in the Egyptian Traditional Rite founded by Raimondo di Sangro (1710-1771), seventh Prince of San Severo, in the mid-seventeenth century.<sup>228</sup>

In the words of author Federico d'Andrea:

Accurate researches, undertaken in particular archives, attest to the foundation of an *Antiquus Ordo Egypti* by Raimondo di Sangro, order in which a Rite of Misraim seu Aegypti operated, on 10 December 1747. Research, conducted by various scholars following successful findings, has demonstrated the creation by Prince di Sangro of a secret lodge, with clear hermetic and Rosicrucian leanings, named *Rosa d'Ordine Magno* (Rose of the Great Order).<sup>229</sup>

Unfortunately such claims are rarely backed by documentary evidence, so this particular facet of Italian occultism seems destined to remain outside the domain of serious etic research. Nevertheless, it is important to state that such stirrings were

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Tipografia delle Belle Arti, 1866); Ciro Nispi Landi, *Le Storie d'Italia Narrate in Otto Grandi Eta' dalle piu' Lontane Origini a Noi* (Rome: Salviucci, 1879).

<sup>227</sup> Arguably, the most useful overview of the Neapolitan milieu from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century is Gian Mario Cazzaniga, 'Ermetismo ed Egizianesimo a Napoli dai Lumi alla Fratellanza di Miriam, in *Annali d'Italia 25: Esoterismo*, pp. 547-566.

<sup>228</sup> For a useful introduction to di Sangro's ties to Freemasonry, see Domenico Vittorio Ripa Montesano, *Raimondo di Sangro Principe di San Severo Primo Gran Maestro del Rito Egizio Tradizionale* (Naples: pp., 2011); for more general biographies on di Sangro, see Antonio Emanuele Piedimonte, *Raimondo di Sangro Principe di Sansevero, La Vita, le Opere, i Libri, la Cappella, le Leggende, i Misteri* (Naples: Intra Moenia, 2012) or the standard reference biography by Lidia Sansone Vagni, *Raimondo di Sangro Principe di San Severo*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Foggia: Bastogi, 1992).

<sup>229</sup> Federico d'Andrea, *Raimondo di Sangro, Principe di Sansevero e la Tradizione Egizia Napoletana*, [accademiakremmerziana, accademiakremmerziana.it/Home\\_03\\_09\\_08.htm](http://accademiakremmerziana.it/Home_03_09_08.htm) (accessed September 20 2014): 'Ricerche accurate, svolte in archivi particolari, attestano la fondazione da parte del Principe Raimondo di Sangro di Sansevero di un *Antiquus Ordo Aegypti*, nel quale operò il *Rito di Misraim seu Aegypti*, il 10 dicembre 1747. Ricerche fatte da vari studiosi in seguito a fortunati ritrovamenti, hanno dimostrato la formazione da parte del Principe di Sangro di una loggia segreta, ad indirizzo chiaramente ermetico e rosicruciano, chiamato 'Rosa d'Ordine Magno'.

present in Naples, and that they almost certainly had an influence on the future Roman Traditionalist outlook of Armentano and Reghini.

Such a link to Egypt and initiatory knowledge, though, is much older, as can be attested by the statue representing an anthropomorphic rendition of the river Nile, commissioned by Egyptian Alexandrine immigrants in the second or third century AD, and which to this date can be seen in Naples, located almost adjacent to a small square, named *Piazzetta Nilo*, or Nile Square, in the proximity of which we can find a building that had belonged to Di Sangro, in whose subterranean chambers the remains of the ancient temple of Isis in Naples are allegedly to be found.<sup>230</sup> It may be pure chance, but not for the seventeenth and nineteenth century occultists who believed in the inherent hermetic power, that two of the most remarkable early modern Italian thinkers, namely Giordano Bruno and Tommaso Campanella, had both studied at the Convent of *San Domenico*: a stone's throw from *Piazzetta Nilo*. It is in a building overlooking the very same square that one of the most famous occultists of the turn of the century, Ciro Formisano,<sup>231</sup> better known by his hyeronym Giuliano Kremmerz, was allegedly initiated into the Egyptian Great Orient, in the presence of one of the great figures of nineteenth-century Italian occultism: Giustiniano Lebano. The *Ordine Egizio* (or Egyptian Order) had seemingly been a masonic structure, which oversaw the cultural input in the various Egyptian lodges in Naples, although, again, the lack of conclusive evidence prevents the serious scholar to agree wholeheartedly with the

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<sup>230</sup> See Gennaro Ruggiero, *Le Piazze di Napoli* (Rome: Newton Compton, 1998) and Comitato per il Restauro della Statua del Corpo di Napoli, *Lo Sguardo del Nilo: Storia e Recupero del "Corpo di Napoli"* (Napoli: Colonnese, 1993); for the hermetic symbols in the San Severo Chapel, see Edoardo Nappi, *La Famiglia, il Palazzo, la Cappella dei Principi di Sansevero* (Geneva: Droz, 1975) and Antonella Golia, *Cappella Sansevero, Il Tempio della Virtù e dell'Arte* (Naples: Akroamatikos, 2009).

<sup>231</sup> Only few articles have been written about Kremmerz and his works in languages other than Italian: among these see Massimo Introvigne, 'De l'Hypertrophie de la Filiation: le Milieu Kremmerzien en Italie', *ARIES – Association pour la Recherche et l'Information sur l'Ésotérisme, Symboles et Mythes dans les Mouvements Initiatiques et Ésotériques (XVII et XXe siècles): Filiations et emprunts* (Paris: Archè – La Table d'Émeraude, 1999), pp. 148-156 and, Hans T. Hakl, 'The Theory and Practice of Sexual Magic, Exemplified by Four Magical Groups in the Early Twentieth Century', in *Hidden Intercourse: Eros and Sexuality in the History of Western Esotericism*, ed. by Wouter J. Hanegraaff and Jeffrey J. Kripal (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), pp. 445-478. For standard works on Kremmerz's life in Italian, see Jah-Hel, *La Pietra Angolare Miriamica: Storia Documentata della Fratellanza di Miriam di Giuliano Kremmerz* (Viareggio: Rebis, 1989), *Il Maestro Giuliano Kremmerz. L'Uomo - La Missione - L'Opera*, ed. by Pier Luca Pierini (Rebis: Viareggio, 1985) and the more philosophical-analytical Piero Di Vona, *Giuliano Kremmerz* (Salerno: Edizioni di Ar, 2005).

research conducted.<sup>232</sup> Fabrizio Giorgio writes that ‘the contribution that such milieus gave to the Unitarian movement wasn’t, in any case, just of a cultural nature, since all those who are described as the major exponents of the Egyptian Order of the time participated, “with true Roman spirit”, to the insurrections of the Risorgimento’.<sup>233</sup> Foremost among the members of the *Ordine Egizio*, and one of the most mysterious occultists of the Naples milieu, was Domenico Bocchini, who allegedly led the order until the day of his death, and published a short lived journal *Il Geronta Sebezio* (or *The Wise Man of the Sebetus*), which specialised in the arcane origins of the Pelasgians and their link to ancient Rome.<sup>234</sup> Bocchini’s teachings were rarely straightforward, and what still remains of his writings, shows an erudite partial to the primordial Italic Tradition:

The Roman Labyrinth of which the classics speak of was the [secret] sovereign Palladium of Rome of which Eusebius spoke to the plebs [...]. And Pliny says, that for having just spoken about it, Valerius Soranus had lost his head [...]. We think that for Italian Labyrinth we must understand all the Orphic elements in the whole of Italy.<sup>235</sup>

And on Pythagoras too, Bocchini seemed to have great intuitions: ‘[s]o it seems that the name Pythagoras was like that of Zoroaster, of Aliced, of Jupiter, of Mercury Trismegistus, and other primeval *hyerophants*; for whom the name was [constituted by] their Ministry and not [by] the person. And with this idea we reconcile an infinite quantity of anachronisms that we find in Greek and Latin Poets’.<sup>236</sup> Upon Bocchini’s death, after a brief *interregnum* during which a mysterious character only known by

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<sup>232</sup> See Introvigne, ‘Hypertrophie de la Filiation’, pp.151-156.

<sup>233</sup> Giorgio, *Roma*, p. 150

<sup>234</sup> *Il Geronta Sebezio* (Naples: Torchi del Tramaner, 1835-37).

<sup>235</sup> Domenico Bocchini, *Gli Arcani Gentilizi*, Vol. 3 (Naples: Torchi del Tramaner, 1837), p. 22, ‘Il Labirinto Romano di cui ci parlano i classici era il sovrano Palladio di Roma di cui Eusebio parlo’ alla plebe [...]. E Plinio ci dice, che per averne solo parlato, Valerio Solano perse la testa. [...] Creiamo che come Labirinto Italiano dobbiamo intendere gli elementi Orfici in tutta Italia’.

<sup>236</sup> Domenico Bocchini, *La Sapienza degli Arcani Vetusti*, p. 136 of the manuscript, republished in Riccardo Donato, *La Chiave della Sapienza Ermetica*, Vol. 2 (Viareggio: Rebis, 2014), p. 201, ‘Cosicché pare che il nome di Pitagora fosse come quello di Zoroastro, di Alcide, di Giove, di Mercurio Trismegisto, e degli altri *Hierophanti* primi; per cui solo il Ministero, e non nella persona era il nome. E con questa idea si conciliano una infinita quantità di anacronismi, che si veggiono nè Poeti Greci e Latini’.



the name of *Mamo-Rosar-Amru* took a position of leadership, and after the death of his successor Pasquale de Servis (1818-1893) Giustiniano Lebano, who had married Bocchini's niece, allegedly became his successor as leader of the *Ordine Egizio*.<sup>237</sup>

Lebano, according to Mengozzi, had been a very high-ranking member of the *Sebezia* Lodge, where the author had gained the highest degree achievable. He was a key figure of the Neapolitan occult milieu, acting as a *trait d'union* between the various Egyptian orders such as the Egyptian Great Orient and the mysterious *Ordine Egizio Osirideo* (Osirian Egyptian Order), and its more Italic-Traditionalist approach, which later found a receptive centre in Rome under the aegis of neo-pagan occultists Amedeo Rocco Armentano and Arturo Reghini.<sup>238</sup> In the second part of the nineteenth century, Naples was a renowned centre for the European occult intelligentsia, and many figures connected to the occult world paid Lebano a visit, according to the theories of Kremmerzian scholars, from Dr. Franz Hartmann (1838-1912), and Sir Bulwer-Lytton (1803-1873), the latter in need of inspiration for his *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1834), to the young Kremmerz himself.<sup>239</sup> Giustiniano Lebano may have been an inspiration to Giuliano Kremmerz in the field of therapeutic magic too: having lost all of his male sons to epidemics of cholera between 1867 and 1884, Lebano developed theories on the origin of the disease, which, according to him, came from 'areas of Tartarus, created by magical arts of foreign priests'.<sup>240</sup> Lebano's wife, understandably aggrieved, took her life by setting fire to herself and to her husband's extensive occult collection, so the extent of his influence on his followers

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<sup>237</sup> On Lebano, see Ely-Isis, 'Giustiniano Lebano ed i Misteri Classici Antichi', *Ignis Rivista di Studi Iniziatici* 1 (1990), pp. 25-27; Gaetano Lo Monaco, *L'Ordine Osirideo Egizio e la Trasmissione Pitagorica* (Naples: Carpe Librum, 2000); Michele E. Barraco *Giustiniano Lebano e la Scuola di Napoli* (Nove: Libreria Editrice "Letture S...consigliate", 1999).

<sup>238</sup> Publisher Victrix has published many of Lebano's writings, collecting them in 5 volumes. The subjects range from the cure of obscure illnesses to a work dedicated to the topic of hell; for more interesting documents, which had been until now been consulted in manuscript form, see Riccardo Donato, *La Chiave della Sapienza Ermetica secondo Giuliano Kremmerz, Domenico Bocchini e Giustiniano Lebano*, Vol. I-II (Rebis: Viareggio, 2012-2014). Never before have so many documents by Lebano been made available to the general public.

<sup>239</sup> See Giuseppe Maddalena Capiferro and Cristian Guzzo, *L'Arcano degli Arcani: Storia dell'Ermetismo Egizio-Partenopeo fra i Secoli XVIII-XX* (Viareggio: Rebis, 2005); also see Gaetano Lo Monaco, 'Edward Bulwer Lytton e l'Ambiente Iniziatico Partenopeo Nilense', *Atrium* 6:3 (2004), pp. 6-57, for a discussion on Bulwer Lytton's probable involvement with Lebano

<sup>240</sup> Giustiniano Lebano, *Del Morbo Oscuro chiamato Areteo Ociphon Sincope impropriamente creduto dagli europei Cholera Morbus* (Naples: Tocco & C., 1881), p. 10.

is difficult to quantify. In any case, it is fair to say that interest in medicine and the treatment of diseases was a peculiar aspect common to Neapolitan occultists, and Lebano's subdivision of healers in two categories, the *Ippocrati* (*Hippocrates*), divinely inspired healers, and the *Ipocrati* (*Hipocrates*), medics with a university degree, certainly seems to point towards the belief in the superiority of a hermetic therapeutic treatment, over the scientific one.<sup>241</sup> Lebano's contacts with Bulwer-Lytton, the French occultist Eliphas Levi (1810-1875) and author, Freemason and supporter of the Garibaldine cause Alexandre Dumas (1802-1870), for a short period of time seems to have transformed Naples into one of the occult centres of Europe.<sup>242</sup>

Lebano's teachings, consultable in manuscript form only until very recently, can give us an idea to the quality and quantity of theories tied to the *prisca sapientia*, that the order passed down to the more pliable masonic organisations in Naples. 'We know where precious metals are,' wrote Lebano, 'the Sacred Signs and Sacred Objects of the Fathers of Rome. In due time we will reveal where they are, for now the times are not ripe.'<sup>243</sup> Lebano was instrumental in suffusing the Egyptian Masonic scene in Naples with the tenets of the ancient wisdom, which he saw as corrupt and sorely lacking a rigorous practical application. It was through him, chiefly, that Mazzoldi and Mengozzi's theories were able to mix with the alleged Egyptian Freemasonry of Raimondo di Sangro, and subsequently influence Arturo Reghini, his master Armentano, and the Roman Traditionalist milieu. A mention must be made of Giuliano Kremmerz, or Kremm-Erz. As the last great representative of the Neapolitan school, and because of the great influence his work had on twentieth century occultists, a short mention must be made in this chapter. If Lebano made the Italic traditions re-emerge in the Neapolitan occult circles, Kremmerz was the person who divulged the information in highly successful, but short-lived journals: in

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<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2.

<sup>242</sup> On the Neapolitan occult milieu, see G. Maddalena Capiferro, Cristian Guzzo, Gaetano Lo Monaco and Michele Di Iorio, *Sairitis Hus. Gli Antri, le Sirene, la Luce, l'Ombra. Appunti Biografici Ermetici della Napoli Ottocentesca* (Mussolente: Carpe Librum, 2001); G. Maddalena Capiferro and Cristian Guzzo, *L'Arcano degli Arcani, Lungo il Nilo dell'Ordine Osirideo Egizio. Il Mito dell'Eterno Ritorno, ovvero la Lampada della Vita dall'Ombra delle Piramidi alla luce del Sebeto* (Viareggio: Rebis, 2005). On the Lebano-Lévi and Lebano-Dumas connections, see Gian Mario Cazzaniga, 'Ermetismo ed Egizianesimo'.

<sup>243</sup> Giusitiano Lebano, *Manuscript*, quoted in Riccardo Donato, *La Chiave della Sapienza Ermetica*, p. 99, 'Noi coonosciamo dove sono i preziosi metalli, i Sacri Segni e i Sacri Oggetti dei Padri dell'Urbe. A suo tempo indicheremo dove stanno, perché ora i tempi non sono maturi'.

*Commentarium* (1910-11), a journal Kremmerz edited, his ideas on the grandiosity of Rome are evident, and Kremmerz seems to have learned the esoteric teachings of his masters: ‘Of the prophecies on Rome I know many, [I] have known them for a long time [...]. There is one, for example, that foretells nothing less than an Imperial Rome and the resurrection of the Latin Glory and of the mission of justice of the great civilization of the third lay Rome’.<sup>244</sup> In another of his works, Kremmerz adopts even more nationalistic tones, when it comes to defending the occult primacy of his country, an aspect that would definitely not be lost on Reghini, Armentano, Parise and the other members of the their group:

If the occult Urbs knew the secrets of the science of the human psyche as an Etruscan and Graeco-Egyptian inheritance, can't the poetic mythology of our ancestors have hidden the truth of a concrete science of the spirit of man? Why is it preferable playing at being Indian with symbols of Budda [sic], of Brama, of the Parsi, when Jupiter and the major deities of the Latin Olympus can honourably hold their ground?<sup>245</sup>

## 6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

I hope to have convinced the reader on the utility of such a ‘historical’ chapter before the analysis of Reghini’s life and a hermeneutic approach to his writings may start. In this chapter, it was my goal to highlight the four major strands in the political, social and occult milieus, which looking in retrospect, had the biggest influences on the young Reghini. The narrative of the *Risorgimento*, which at the turn of the century was still celebrated with motion pictures and fiction devoted to that particular time in Italian history, was crucial to Reghini, who enrolled for military service in World War

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<sup>244</sup> Giuliano Kremmerz, ‘Piccola Posta – M.O. Firenze’, *Commentarium* 2:2-3 (1911), p. 131, ‘Delle profezie su Roma ne conosco molte, da molto tempo [...]. Ve n’è una, per esempio, che predice nientemeno che una Roma Imperiale e la resurrezione della Gloria Latina e della missione di giustizia della grande civiltà della terza Roma laica’.

<sup>245</sup> Giuliano Kremmerz, *I Dialoghi sull’Ermetismo*, Vol. 1 (Spoleto: Arti Grafiche Panetto e Petrelli, 1929), p. 14, ‘Se l’Urbe occulta conobbe in eredità, etrusca e greco-egizia, gli arcani della scienza della psiche umana, la mitologia poetica dei nostri progenitori non può aver celato le verità di una scienza concreta dello spirito dell’uomo? Perché è preferibile fare l’indiano coi simboli di Budda, di Brama, o dei Parsi, quando Giove e le deità maggiori dell’Olimpo Latino possono tenere onorevolmente il paragone?’

One convinced that he was still fighting a Risorgimental war in order to conquer even the last pieces of land which constituted the province of Italy under the Roman empire. The analysis of Freemasonry, which overlapped in an evident fashion with the political circles of the time, makes it clearer to grasp Reghini's future rejection of traditional masonry, in order to recreate everything from scratch, providing it with a preponderant spiritual element, that, according to Reghini, had been long lost. In Freemasonry Reghini saw an *élite intellectuelle*, which should have been able to guide the newly founded country to a Pagan spiritual awakening, and nothing of this sort is to be found in the late 1800s Italian *Massoneria*.

This chapter has also provided a chance to locate the narratives that would bring a young intellectual like Reghini to embrace a rabid, sometimes maniacal, critique of Semitic religions, Christianity *in primis*: as we shall see, while the nationalists of his day were mostly religiously aligned with the Vatican, Reghini looked back to figures like Garibaldi and Mazzini, who shared what may definitely be defined as hatred in the Catholic Church's regards. Briefly describing the socio-political climate of the second half of the nineteenth-century is, in my opinion a vital endeavour in a dissertation such as this, in order to avoid falling into the trap of labelling Reghini a lone rambling madman: there was an important history of anticlericalism that traversed the 1800s and was still very much alive in the early 1900s, and Reghini was but one of the many representatives of this current of thought.

Although his interest in Spiritualism was not great, Reghini went on to help create the very first Italian Theosophical circle in the late 1890s, at a very young age. As we shall see in the next chapter, Reghini's Theosophical period has been often overlooked by his biographers and scholars of Roman Traditionalism. A section on the entity and vastness of the spread of occult ideas in the nineteenth century was therefore a *desideratum* in order to show that it was perfectly normal for a young member of the upper class to be fascinated and lured in by occult theories and societies: we are not talking about an eccentric young mathematician who joined obscure secret societies, but of a member of the cultural elite of his day, following the example set by royalty, beacons of Italian culture, and scientific luminaries.

Finally the fourth section, much more circumscribed and specific than the previous ones, was necessary in order to understand from where Armentano and Reghini obtained or sourced their ideas of a Roman occult primacy and of an Italian pagan revival. The Naples School has been thoroughly under-researched, but I hope to have shown that certain ideas were circulating in fin de siècle Naples, and bore a striking resemblance to what would be accomplished in the 1900s by Reghini's coterie.

After this chapter, historical and didactic in essence, Reghini's life and writings may be discussed, analysed and interpreted with greater ease. The two prerequisites of this chapter, that of giving an informative outline of last thirty years of the nineteenth century and that of providing a clear introduction to Roman Traditionalist ideas, have been, I hope, met, and Reghini's Theosophical period, with its straddling of Tradition and avant-garde, may be attempted.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE EARLY YEARS (1902-1910): AVANT-GARDE, THEOSOPHY, ANTIMODERNISM

New religion is in line with modernity:  
It has no apostles, but journals,  
No martyrs, but victims who end up  
Filling psychiatric hospitals with their  
Brains shocked by nervous exaltations.<sup>246</sup>

Luigi Capuana

#### 1. SCOPE OF THE CHAPTER

The scope of this chapter will be threefold: firstly, I will strive to provide the reader with a comprehensive introduction to the Italian philosophical milieu of the beginning of the twentieth century: a special focus will be given to Benedetto Croce, the Neapolitan Idealist who, more than anybody, shaped the philosophical discourse of the day, and to the phenomenon called *Florentine Scapigliatura*,<sup>247</sup> of which

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<sup>246</sup> Capuana, *Mondo Occulto*, p. 221: La nuova religione muove il passo con la modernità: non ha apostoli, ma riviste, non martiri, ma vittime che finiscono per riempire manicomi con i loro cervelli colpiti da esaltazioni nervose’.

<sup>247</sup> The term *Scapigliatura* was originally used in the title of Cletto Arrighi’s *La Scapigliatura e il 6 Febbrajo* (Milan: Sonzogno, 1861), in which the author described a new type of Italian, or better, Milanese artist, heavily influenced by the French *bohème*, in whose works the line between life and art was often blurred and whom Arrighi described as ‘real pandemonium of the century [...], reservoir of the spirit of revolt and opposition to all established order’, (p. 6). To be a *Scapigliato*, literally, ‘with unkept hairstyle’ or ‘dishevelled’, meant to oppose the status quo, in every facet of life: figurative arts, music, literature and in life itself. Its main representatives were Cesare Emilio Praga (1839-1875), more famous for his poetry collections *Tavolozze* (Milan: Casa Editrice Autori-Editori, 1862) and *Penombre* (Milan: Casa Editrice Autori-Editori, 1864), and his friend and fellow author Iginio Ugo Tarchetti (1839-1869), most famous for one of the greatest works among the literature of the *Scapigliatura*, *Fosca* (Milan: Sonzogno, 1869). Influenced by foreign decadent literature, the *Scapigliati* were inspired by Charles Baudelaire, E.T.A. Hoffmann and Heinrich Heine, to mention but three: the *Scapigliati* sought to break literary conventions of the time by writing about subjects as taboo and diverse as orgies, drug use, the allure of death and the exaltation of ugliness. With different aims, as we shall see, but with the same iconoclasm, the group of artists who gathered around Papini and Prezzolini at the turn of the century certainly earned their entry into the roster of the *Scapigliati*, giving birth to a Florentine version of the *Scapigliatura*. On the phenomenon of the Florentine *Scapigliatura*, see Paolo Casini, *Alle Origini del Novecento, “Il Leonardo”, 1903-1907* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2002); Augusto Hermet, *La Ventura delle Riviste* (Florence: Vallecchi, 1941); *La Cultura Italiana del ‘900*

Giovanni Papini and Giuseppe Prezzolini were the main movers, with their literary/philosophical journals.<sup>248</sup> At least in the first decade of the century, Florence, city in which Reghini grew and developed long-lasting friendships, was one of Italy's cultural capitals, and many of the avant-garde movements that successively were born in other regions, owe much to the exciting and vibrant atmosphere of the Tuscan city. The second and most important scope of this chapter will be that of highlighting the antimodern, counter-Positivist, aristocratic and Traditionalist traits present within Florence's learned society, which, in my opinion, certainly shaped the views of the young Reghini and that Reghini himself divulged to the best of his capacity.<sup>249</sup> Reghini, along with Papini, Prezzolini and many others, seemed to straddle the seemingly far-fetched concepts of avant-garde and Tradition, and, through an analysis of his contributions to journals of the time, correspondence and presentations

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*Attraverso le Riviste, Volume Primo, "Leonardo", "Hermes", "Il Regno",* ed. by Delia Frigessi (Turin: Einaudi, 1960); Eugenio Garin, *Cronache di Filosofia Italiana, 1900/1943* (Rome-Bari: Editori Laterza, 1975); idem, *Intellettuali Italiani del XX Secolo* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1974); Nicola Lisi, *Parlata dalla Finestra di Casa* (Florence: Vallecchi, 1973); Antonietta Grippo, *L'Avanguardia Esoterica* (Potenza: Literalia, 1997); and possibly the most relevant study by Lucia Strappini, Claudia Micocci and Alberto Abruzzese, *La Classe dei Colti: Intellettuali e Società nel Primo Novecento Italiano* (Bari: Laterza, 1970).

<sup>248</sup> The friendship and relationship between these two authors and thinkers was a productive and long-lasting one, and ended only in 1956, the year of Papini's death. The vast correspondence between the two, which I shall be utilising in this chapter, has been first collected in the *Fondazione Primo Conti* in Fiesole, Tuscany, and then published in an annotated, three volume set, of which I will be consulting the first, Giovanni Papini and Giuseppe Prezzolini, *Carteggio I (1900-1907)* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2003). For a basic bibliography on Giovanni Papini, focusing on the period this chapter will deal with, see idem, *Il Crepuscolo dei Filosofi* (Milan: Società Editrice Lombarda, 1906); idem, *Un Uomo Finito* (Florence: Libreria della Voce, 1913), idem, *Il Non Finito, Diario 1900 e Scritti Inediti Giovanili*, ed. by Anna Casini Paszkowski (Florence: Casa Editrice Le Lettere, 2005); idem, *Passato Remoto (1885-1914)* (Florence: L'Arco, 1948). For Prezzolini, especially for the timeframe this chapter treats and the themes tackled, see idem, *Cos'è il Modernismo?* (Milan: Fratelli Treves Editori, 1908); idem, *Benedetto Croce. Con Bibliografia, Ritratto e Autografo* (Naples: Riccardo Ricciardi Editore, 1909); idem, *Studi e Capricci sui Mistici Tedeschi. Saggio sulla Libertà Mistica – Meister Eckehart [sic] - La Deutsche Theologie - Paracelso - Novalis – Giovanni Von Hooghens* (Florence: Casa Editrice Italiana, 1912).

<sup>249</sup> In her work *Futurismo Esoterico, Contributi per una Storia dell'Irrazionalismo Italiano tra Otto e Novecento* (Naples: Liguori Editore, 2002), p.78, Simona Cigliana is very clear in linking Reghini to Papini's and Prezzolini's fundamental views on life: 'Just as Reghini, Borgese and the group around the journal "Hermes"- who had declared themselves as "idealists in philosophy" as they "were aristocratic" in the arts and individualists in life, the youths writing on the journal Leonardo [edited by Papini and Prezzolini] had too confessed of being idealists'. The influence of Reghini on this milieu will be all the more clear as the chapter will quote many authors and philosophers writing about Reghini and his pivotal role in 1900s Florence.

delivered at the *Biblioteca Teosofica*, I will argue that early twentieth-century occultism, in its Italian Theosophical and Traditionalist variant, definitely did not verge ‘towards the progressive, liberal pole of the cultural and political spectrum’ as its British counterpart probably did.<sup>250</sup> The germs of what Guénon would later refer to as the missing, yet fundamental existence of an *élite intellectuelle*, granted access to occult knowledge in virtue of a superior intellectual capacity and destined to form the minds of the masses, were somewhat bubbling to the surface in the 1900s Florence.<sup>251</sup> Finally, I will focus on Reghini and his membership within the Theosophical Society:<sup>252</sup> previous research had claimed this period to be just a trivial, inconsequential one for the formation of young Reghini.<sup>253</sup> It will be my aim to refute this simplistic point of view and firmly place his adherence to the Theosophical Society in the vaster framework of his Traditionalist views. Reghini, as documentation with high-ranking members of the Society and his pivotal role as curator of the *Biblioteca Teosofica* show, played a key role in the cultural life of the time. We may in fact go as far as to say that, to a more mainstream audience, these years represent Reghini’s glory days, before a progressive fascination with

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<sup>250</sup> Marco Pasi, ‘The Modernity of Occultism’, p. 63.

<sup>251</sup> Guénon, *Orient et Occident*: ‘[L]’élite intellectuelle n’aurait pas besoin d’être fort nombreuse, au début surtout, pour que son influence puisse s’exercer d’une manière très effective, même sur ceux qui ne se douteraient aucunement de son existence ou qui ne soupçonneraient pas le moins du monde la portée de ses travaux.’ See also Émile Durkheim, ‘L’Élite Intellectuelle et la Démocratie’, in *Revue Bleue*, 5:1 (1904), pp. 705-6.

<sup>252</sup> For the most important study on the Theosophical Society in Italy in the first years of the twentieth century, see Marco Pasi, ‘Theosophy and Anthroposophy’. Also see Paola Giovetti, ‘La Società Teosofica nel Mondo’, in idem, *Helena Petrovna Blavatsky e la Società Teosofica* (Rome: Edizioni Mediterranee, 2010), pp. 160-166; A seminal work on Theosophy in Italy has been recently edited by Antonio Girardi, *La Società Teosofica: Storia, Valori, Realtà Attuale* (Vicenza: Edizioni Teosofiche Italiane, 2014): the third section of the book ‘La Società Teosofica in Italia’, pp. 69-88, is especially useful. For a more general account of the Theosophical Society and its history, see Joscelyn Godwin, ‘The Parting of East and West’, in idem, *The Theosophical Enlightenment* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1994), pp. 363-379; Bruce F. Campbell, *The Theosophical Movement* (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1980) and *The Handbook of the Theosophical Current*, ed. by Olav Hammer and Mikael Rothstein (Leiden: Brill, 2013), with a focus on the chapters by Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, ‘Western Esoteric Traditions and Theosophy’, pp. 261-308 and Gary W. Trompf, ‘Theosophical Macrohistory’, pp. 375-404.

<sup>253</sup> See Sestito, *Figlio del Sole*, p. 24: ‘In this ill-boding hodgepodge, not too promising for the awakening of esotericism in Italy, which was Reghini’s wish, arose in him the decision to leave the Theosophical Society, while waiting for better times and better men’. See di Luca, *Reghini*, p. 24: ‘It was not still a question of taking his distance from occultism and theosophism, but only a discrimination between a “serious” and a “non-serious” occultism. Reghini was vocally in favour of the “great” occultists (Martinez de Pasqually, Louis-Claude de Saint-Martin, Eliphas Lévi, Papus, according to a very eclectic and equally improbable filiation, which was nevertheless one supported by the Martinist Order’.



Traditionalist ideas and masonic environments subtracted him from the limelight. The many mentions of the Florentine Traditionalist, made by famous members of the city's intelligentsia, will be duly recorded, and the development of Reghini's thoughts, in matters of nationalism, Traditionalism, occultism, and elitism, will be quoted from his writings and the musings of those close to him.

## 2. REGHINI'S EARLY LIFE AND THE REGHINI DI PONTREMOLI FAMILY

An brief analysis of Reghini's early life, or what can be surmised from the scant evidence, should be attempted at this point, in order to better position the figure of the Florentine thinker at the turn of the century. Before a new interest in the Florentine mathematician captivated the curiosity of Italian researchers and scholars, Reghini's life, as his works had, mainly remained shrouded in mystery.<sup>254</sup> Most of the biographical anecdotes were slight variations of Giulio Parise's 'Nota sulla Vita e l'Attività Massonica dell'Autore' ('Essay on the Life and Masonic Activity of the Author'), published in a scarce posthumous edition of Reghini's *Considerations*.<sup>255</sup> Even this brief introduction is replete with details and dates, which, at a closer scrutiny do not seem to match, some examples being the wrong date given for his involvement in the Theosophical Society and his role within the Society itself, whose first group Parise tells us the Florentine philosopher helped found in 1898. Archival research on his family background and illustrious history may give the reader glimpses of Reghini's background and allow us to conjecture, where we have no documentation whatsoever available, about his status, the quality of his upbringing and the prestige of his family.<sup>256</sup> Biographer de Luca tells us very little about his origins: he is only able to ascertain that the Reghini di Pontremoli, Arturo's town of

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<sup>254</sup> See Mario Foti, 'La Riscoperta di Arturo Reghini negli Anni '80. Da "Il Ghibellino" alla Associazione Pitagorica', *La Cittadella* 6-7: 23-4-5, *la Sapienza Pitagorica*, pp. 230-240.

<sup>255</sup> Reghini, *Considerazioni*, pp. v-xv.

<sup>256</sup> Most of my research on Reghini's early life is based on Renato del Ponte's excellent archival work, and often, when consulting archives which I thought would allow me to glean more about the topic at hand, I too had to stop where del Ponte has, for a total lack of extra documentation, found in my research. See Renato del Ponte, 'Un'Antica Famiglia Italiana-Una Nota sulla Stirpe dei Reghini', in *La Sapienza Pitagorica*, pp. 177-183.

provenance, were a noble family with a long history.<sup>257</sup> Sestito, in his biography, begins analysing Reghini's life from 1906.<sup>258</sup> The Reghini family and its influence in the area around the town of Pontremoli may be traced without interruption back to the Thirteenth century<sup>259</sup> The first historical figure we can be absolutely certain of is Petricciolo Reghini (nd.), deputy to the bishop of Luni, who is cited in a document dated 1317.<sup>260</sup> Petricciolo would be the first of a very long list of Reghini's descendants linked to the clergy or more directly to the Vatican: one Cesare Reghini (1580-1658) was made bishop of the town of Sarsina by Pope Innocent X (1574-1665); author Emanuele Gerini writes that, three years after his death, when the holy man's body was exhumed, it had defied the process of decomposition and was as pristine as on the day it had been buried.<sup>261</sup> Once the city of Pontremoli had been decreed to be 'Noble City' by the Grand-duke of Tuscany on 14 April 1778, the Reghini family became part of the local nobility, as by decree of 27 November 1782.<sup>262</sup> The constant characteristics of the Reghini family, across the centuries, were its status, its wealth, and its close ties to the Catholic Church, although not all Reghins were as saintly as Cesare had been, as in the case of Teodoro Reghini (nd.), who 'escaped to Genoa, climbing down a window of the seminar' in order to reach Garibaldi and his red shirts.<sup>263</sup> Because of the close ties between the Reghini family and the Vatican, Marcello Reghini (b. 1920), Arturo's nephew, taking into account his strong anticlerical views, confessed to Del Ponte that Arturo had always been considered the black sheep of the family.<sup>264</sup>

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<sup>257</sup> di Luca, *Reghini*, p. 8.

<sup>258</sup> Sestito, *Figlio del Sole*, p. 16.

<sup>259</sup> *Genealogie di Famiglie Pontremolesi*, ed by. Nicola Michelotti (Pontremoli: np., 1993) has been the greatest source of information, as has Bernardino Campi, *Memorie Storiche della Città di Pontremoli* (Pontremoli: Artigianelli, 1975). Less useful, but still containing references to the Reghini family throughout the ages are Roberto Ricci, *Poteri e Territorio in Lunigiana Storica (VII-XII secolo). Uomini, Terre e Poteri in una Regione di Confine* (Spoleto: CISAM, 2002); Emanuele Gerini, *Illustri Scrittori e Uomini Insigni della Lunigiana* (Bologna: Forni, 1986); Ottaviano Giannetti, *Memorie Francescane della Lunigiana e della Lucchesia* (Florence: Pagnini, 2012).

<sup>260</sup> del Ponte, 'Antica Famiglia', p. 179.

<sup>261</sup> Gerini, *Illustri Scrittori*, p. 223.

<sup>262</sup> del Ponte, 'Antica Famiglia', p. 180.

<sup>263</sup> Nicola Michelotti, *Almanacco Pontremolese 2011* (Pontremoli: Artigianelli, 2011), p. 11; see also Pietro Ferrari, 'Un Seminarista in Camicia Rossa: Teodoro Reghini', *Corriere Apuano* 19 (1941), pp. 45-49.

<sup>264</sup> del Ponte, 'Antica Famiglia', p. 178.

Summing up these lamentably few notions gleaned from his genealogy and from the social standing of the family, we can venture to hypothesise that Reghini grew up in a noble, privileged environment, where he had the time and possibility to learn five languages, and to enrol at Pisa university, whence he obtained a degree in Mathematics. It is probably worth highlighting the fact that in 1900, 79% of Italians could not read or write, with peaks of 90% in the South of the country.<sup>265</sup> The amount of detail and the erudition showed even in his very first writings, as we shall see, all point to Reghini belonging to the privileged few families in the early-twentieth-century Florence. The great number of foreign visitors to Florence that Reghini was in contact with, mostly because of their links to the Theosophical Society, is another proof to his privileged status of a noble man, belonging to Florence's aristocracy. It is understandable, then, that with such an upbringing, Reghini's anti-democratic, anti-modern and elitist ideas might have developed from a very early age.

### **3. THE CRISIS OF POSITIVISM AND THE RISE OF NEO-IDEALISM**

#### **3.1. ITALIAN PHILOSOPHY IN THE LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY**

As will be seen later in this chapter, Reghini was very much influenced by the philosophical debate that blossomed during the early years of the twentieth century: in order to better understand his stance, and that of his companions, though, a brief analysis of philosophical trends in the nineteenth and early twentieth century is necessary.

The philosophical systems which had enjoyed the greatest favour in Italy during the first half of the nineteenth century had all possessed a religious underpinning and had provided the ideological fodder to the so-called 'catholic-liberal' movement. Its main proponents were without a doubt Antonio Rosmini-

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<sup>265</sup> Roberto Sani, *Maestri e Istruzione Popolare in Italia tra Otto e Novecento* (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 2003), pp. 81-4; See also Marco Civra, *I Programmi della Scuola Elementare dall'Unità d'Italia al 2000* (Turin: Marco Valerio, 2002); Angelo Gaudio, 'Legislazione e Organizzazione della Scuola, Lotta Contro l'Analfabetismo', in *Storia d'Italia nel Secolo Ventesimo: Strumenti e Fonti - Vol. I: Elementi Strutturali*, ed. by Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali, Dipartimento per i Beni Archivistici e Librari (Rome: Ministero per i Beni e le Attività culturali, Dipartimento per i Beni Archivistici e Librari, 2006), pp. 355-373.

Serbati (1797-1855) and, to a lesser extent, Vincenzo Gioberti (1801-1852).<sup>266</sup> The main strands of Rosmini's philosophy strove to unite a Platonic-Augustinian view of the world with the more recent theories of Emmanuel Kant (1724-1804). Rosmini's two main contributions to the philosophical debate of his time were essentially two: the concept that true dialectic had to be based on the idea of creation and of a primal cause, and that such dialectic would provide a *coniunctio oppositorum*, which would harmonise the opposites that had resulted from creation itself. Rosmini's theories fell out of favour in the 1830s, when philosophical speculations began to be formulated hand-in-hand with ideas of national liberation: this period represented the first apparition of positivist thought on Italian soil, its main theoreticians being Carlo Cattaneo (1801-1869) and Giuseppe Ferrari (1811-1876):<sup>267</sup> supporting the democratic and republican instances that were being elaborated in those years, Cattaneo and Ferrari elaborated theories on social revolution, on the connection between the material essence of civilization and progress, and, not least, on the link between production and class-interaction.<sup>268</sup> A further characteristic of this republican

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<sup>266</sup> Rosmini has also been a great influence on twentieth-century Catholics, and books dedicated to his figure and his approach to religion and philosophy abound. Fundamental primary sources include Antonio Rosmini, *Nuovo Saggio sull'Origine delle Idee* (Rome: Tipografia Salviucci, 1830), especially the third book; idem, *Aristotele Esposto ed Esaminato* (Turin: Scoieta' Editrice di Libri di Filosofia, 1857); idem, *Massime di Perfezione Cristiana* (Milan: Tip. Ed. L.F. Cogliati, 1883). Major secondary sources which facilitate the comprehension of Rosminian theories are Michele Dossi, *Profilo filosofico di Antonio Rosmini* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 1998); Fulvio de Giorgi, *Rosmini e il Suo Tempo. L'educazione dell'Uomo Moderno tra Riforma della Filosofia e Rinnovamento della Chiesa (1797-1833)* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2003); Giuseppe Goisis, *Il Pensiero Politico di Antonio Rosmini e Altri Saggi fra Critica ed Evangelo* (S. Pietro in Cariano: Gabrielli Editori, 2009); and of course, the most important text on Rosmini, the seminal Michele Federico Sciacca, *La Filosofia Morale di Antonio Rosmini* (Milano: Bocca, 1955), where Rosmini's role in the Risorgimento is dealt with with clarity and rigour. On Vincenzo Gioberti, see his *Del Primato*; idem, *Degli Errori Filosofici di Antonio Rosmini* (Capolago: Tipografia Elvetica, 1846); idem, *Il Gesuita Moderno* (Naples: C. Batelli, 1848-9). Out of the vast secondary literature, for an introduction to the works and life of Vincenzo Gioberti, see Giorgio Rumi, *Gioberti*, (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1999) and Marcello Mustè, *La Scienza Ideale. Filosofia e Politica in Vincenzo Gioberti* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2000).

<sup>267</sup> Carlo Cattaneo was a philosopher and political activist. His main works include idem, *Opere Edite ed Inedite di Carlo Cattaneo*, ed. by Agostino Bertani (Florence: Le Monnier, 1891-1892); idem, *Una Teoria della Libertà: Scritti Politici e Federalisti*, ed. by Walter Berberis (Turin: Einaudi, 2011); idem, *Lettere 1821*, ed. by Carlo G. Lacaïta (Milan: Mondadori, 2003); idem, *Dell'Insurrezione di Milano nel 1848 e della Successiva Guerra*, ed. by Luigi Ambrosoli (Milan: Mondadori, 2001); *I Volti di Carlo Cattaneo 1801-1869. Un Grande Italiano del Risorgimento*, ed. by F. della Peruta, C. G. Lacaïta and F. Mazzocca (Milan: Skira, 2001).

<sup>268</sup> See *Filosofia Civile e Federalismo nel Pensiero di Carlo Cattaneo*, ed. by Gastone Gazzarri (Firenze: Nuova Italia, 1996); Carlo Cattaneo, *Industria e Scienza Nuova*, ed. by

wing of positivist thought was, of course, a complete rejection of Rosmini's theories, and an anticlericalism very typical of the historical period in question.<sup>269</sup>

After the unification of Italy in the years going from 1861 to 1870, Italian positivism began to be challenged by what, at least in the peninsula, represented a brand new school of thought: the Neapolitan Hegelian school.<sup>270</sup> Blossoming during the 1840s, when, for example, Georg Hegel's (1770-1831) theories in Germany had been already supplanted by the then cutting edge theories of Karl Marx (1818-1883), this Hegelian school of thought was soon split into two seemingly antithetical positions: a more leftist one, represented by the brothers Bertrando (1817-1883) and Silvio (1822-1893) Spaventa, and Francesco de Sanctis (1817-1883), and a more idealist wing, most conservative in nature, which would give life to neo-Hegelian Idealism.<sup>271</sup> While this conservative neo-Hegelian Idealism will be dealt in major detail in the following paragraph, it will suffice to say that the long-term aims of the Spaventa brothers and their fellow thinkers were that of a final embrace of Hegelian ideas only if intertwined with materialist propositions. It is fair to say, though, that the dominating philosophical current to impose itself on the Italian culture and bourgeoisie, at the end of the nineteenth century was without a doubt Positivism: this new brand of Positivism was vastly different from Cattaneo's and Ferraris's, though, since the well-known cult of science had begun to mingle with phenomenalism and a less rigorous approach.<sup>272</sup> Its major proponent, both praised and criticised at the same

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Delia Castelnuovo Frigessi (Turin: Einaudi 1972); idem, *Uno Stato è una Gente e una Terra*, ed. by Ettore A. Albertoni (Milan, RARA, 1994); Franco della Peruta, *Carlo Cattaneo Politico* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2001).

<sup>269</sup> See, for example, Luca Meldolesi, *Carlo Cattaneo e lo Spirito Italiano* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2013); Nadia Urbinati, *Le Civili Libertà : Positivismo e Liberalismo nell'Italia Unita*, pref. by Norberto Bobbio (Venice: Marsilio, 1990).

<sup>270</sup> Still fundamental to this day is Guido Oldrini, *Il Primo Hegelismo Italiano* (Florence: Vallecchi, 1969); Eugenio Garin also paints a clear picture of the hegelian school in his chapter 'Problemi e Polemiche dell Hegelismo Italiano dell'Ottocento, 1832-1860' and Guido Oldrini, 'L'Hegelismo Ortodosso in Italia', both in *Incidenza di Hegel*, ed. by F. Tessitore (Naples, Morano 1970), pp. 625-662 and 663-682 respectively.

<sup>271</sup> For primary sources, consult Bertrando Spaventa, *Principii di Filosofia*, 2 vols (Naples: Stabilimento Tip. Ghio, 1867); important secondary sources include Eugenio Garin, *Bertrando Spaventa* (Naples: Bibliopolis, 2007); Luigi Gentile, *Coscienza Nazionale e Pensiero Europeo in Bertrando Spaventa* (Chieti: Ed. NOUBS, 2000); Sergio Landucci, *Cultura e Ideologia in Francesco De Sanctis* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1964).

<sup>272</sup> See Augusto Guerra, *Il Mondo Della Sicurezza: Ardigò, Labriola, Croce* (Florence, Sansoni, 1963); Santo Mandolfo, *I Positivisti Italiani (Angiulli-Gabelli-Ardigò)* (Padua, CEDAM 1966).

time, was Roberto Ardigò (1828-1920), who appeared to want to unite a subjectivist view of the world as psychophysical reality with an extreme mechanistic view of nature as creator of itself.<sup>273</sup>

For a brief while, at the end of the nineteenth century, as scholar Eugenio Garin so clearly put, there was a genuine belief that ‘truly Italy had witnessed the birth of the philosopher of the new age, the theoretician of the lay State, and even better would be to say, with a fortunate expression, the theologian of the new democratic and anticlerical Italy’.<sup>274</sup> With the turn of the century though, the Positivist model would enter a crisis from which it would never recover. As scholar Antonio Banfi writes, more and more members belonging to the higher strata of society began seeing through the cracks of Positivism, thus paving the way for the imminent anti-positivist intellectual barrage of the first decade of the century: ‘the heirs of Positivism were contrite [philosophers] in search for absolution, aiming at diluting bourgeois progressivism and social-democracy in a humanitarianism [typical of] an amateur rally’.<sup>275</sup> The crisis of Positivism of the 1890s and 1900s has been analysed by intellectual historians and philosophers alike: it is not the scope of the chapter to analyse the reasons of the anti-Positivist backlash, but, as far as the Italian situation is concerned, Garin synthesises the historical moment very succinctly and precisely, when noticing that the main cause of the fall of Positivism in the peninsula was a sharp break between science and philosophy, where the philosophers were at most amateur scientists, and the scientists were completely devoid of any philosophical baggage whatsoever:

the [...] real people responsible were, not the Idealists, like some obtuse divulggers like to say, but those hapless Positivists, who, with their generic

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<sup>273</sup> See Roberto Ardigò, *La Morale dei Positivisti* (Milan: Marzorati, 1973 [1879]; idem, *Scritti Varii* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1922); Giovanni Landucci, ‘Note sulla Formazione del Pensiero di Roberto Ardigò’, *Giornale Critico della Filosofia Italiana*, 53 (1974), pp. 16-60; Mario Quaranta, *Il Positivismo Veneto* (Rovigo: Minelliana, 2003).

<sup>274</sup> Eugenio Garin, *Cronache di Filosofia Italiana*, p. 5: ‘fosse davvero nato in Italia il filosofo dei tempi nuovi, il teorico dello Stato laico, e meglio sarebbe dire, con espressione fortunata, il teologo della nuova Italia democratica e anticlericale’.

<sup>275</sup> Antonio Banfi, ‘Verità e Umanità nella Filosofia Contemporanea’, *Critica Filosofica*, 8 (1947), pp. 83-198 [97]: ‘gli epigoni del positivismo furon dei contriti in cerca di un’assoluzione, intesi a diluire il progressismo borghese e la socialdemocrazia in un umitarianismo da comizio domenicale’.

insinuations, caused the lack of trust in the real scientists and the critique of the most alert philosophers, who would then sweep away, not science- as some believed- but the simple metaphysics that was being smuggled behind a scientific dressing.<sup>276</sup>

It was up to Idealism, in all of its forms of expressions, to pick up the clunky mantle dropped by the automatons of progress.

### 3.2. BENEDETTO CROCE AND IDEALISM AS COUNTER-POSITIVISM

The beginning of the twentieth century marked a sensible shift in the cultural and philosophical outlook of Italian thinkers, and in the way they expressed their condition within modern society: 1903 may be pinpointed as the pivotal year, since this year sees the launch of three journals, different, yet linked in many ways: the first was *Leonardo* (1903-1907), founded by Giovanni Papini and Giuseppe Prezzolini in Florence; the second one was *Il Regno* (1903-1906), founded by nationalist Enrico Corradini (1865-1931);<sup>277</sup> the third was *La Critica* (1903-1944), founded by Benedetto Croce and vehicle of the Hegelian neo-Idealism, which would soon become the main opponent of the stagnant Positivist theories. This paragraph will focus on the figure of Benedetto Croce (1866-1952), arguably the most prominent of Italian philosophers of the first half of the twentieth century and by far the most respected exponent of the Neapolitan Hegelian school of thought. The exclusion from this analysis of the other giant of Italian Idealism, Giovanni Gentile (1875-1944) is dictated not by his lesser relevance within the philosophical milieu of the time, but because it was Croce who

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<sup>276</sup> Eugenio Garin, *La Filosofia*, p. 8: ‘i [...] veri responsabili furono, non già gli idealisti, come certi ottusi ripetitori ricantano, ma proprio quei positivisti sprovveduti che con le loro generiche illazioni determinarono la sfiducia degli scienziati più avvedute le critiche dei filosofi più accorti, che vennero travolgendo, non già la scienza- come taluno credette- ma l’ingenua metafisica che voleva passare da contrabbando sotto panni scientifici’.

<sup>277</sup> Fundamental works on Corradini and early Italian nationalism include Riccardo Gatteschi, *Un Uomo Contro: Enrico Corradini, Letterato e Politico* (Florence: Ellecidi, 2003) and Pier Ludovico Occhini, *Corradini* (Florence: Rinascimento del Libro, 1933). Useful articles in English on Corradini include Mauro Marsella, ‘Enrico Corradini’s Italian Nationalism: the “Right Wing” of the Fascist Synthesis’, *Journal of Political Ideologies* 9:2 (2004), pp. 203-224, and Tullio Pagano, ‘From Diaspora to Empire: Enrico Corradini’s Nationalist Novels’, *Modern Language Notes* 119:1 (2004), pp. 67-83.

dealt more closely with the Florentine *Scapigliati*, with whom Reghini began his career as an author.<sup>278</sup>

Croce's philosophy, after a brief Marxist period at the end of the nineteenth century, no doubt influenced by his teacher Antonio Labriola (1843-1904), was a complete reinterpretation of Hegelian principles in order to create a reactionary philosophy, which could keep both socialism and positivism at bay.<sup>279</sup> His critique of science is emblematic, in these regards: for Croce, as is the case of Gentile, Hegel should have negated all value to natural science and mathematics, which were seen to possess only practical and utilitarian value. Only Idealism could represent a real, trustworthy science.<sup>280</sup> As a direct consequence, Croce denounced Hegel's triad of Idea, Nature and Spirit, granting a higher status to Spirit only. This reform of Hegelian philosophy would marginalise any attempt of a Positivist comeback at least until the end of World War II. It is important to notice, though, that while Benedetto Croce rapidly became a giant within Italian culture, his ideas were acceptable only within Italian confines, since Italy was, at the turn of the century, decades behind other Western European countries and the United States: what Positivism represented in these other states, the ideology of industrialization and imperialism born in the mid-

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<sup>278</sup> A complete bibliography on Croce, one of the most important thinkers of Italy's twentieth century, would be impossible. I will here limit myself to texts which could provide the reader with a clearer understanding of his neo-Idealist philosophical theories: Benedetto Croce, *Ciò che è Vivo e ciò che è Morto della Filosofia di Hegel: Studio Critico Seguito da un Saggio di Bibliografia Hegeliana* (Bari: Laterza, 1907); idem, *La Critica* (Bari: Laterza, 1903-1944); idem, *Logica come Scienza del Concetto Puro* (Bari: Laterza, 1909); idem, *Materialismo Storico ed Economia Marxista* (Naples: Sandron, 1900); idem, *Saggio su Hegel Seguito da Altri Scritti di Storia della Filosofia* (Bari: G. Laterza & Figli, 1913); for secondary literature, see Giuseppe Galasso, *Croce e lo Spirito del Suo Tempo* (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 1990); Marcello Musté, *La Filosofia dell'Idealismo Italiano* (Rome: Carrocci, 2008); Fausto Nicolini, *Benedetto Croce* (Turin: UTET, 1962); Gennaro Sasso, *Filosofia e Idealismo I – Benedetto Croce* (Naples: Bibliopolis, 1994); Guido Verucci, *Idealisti all'Indice: Croce, Gentile e la Condanna del Santo Uffizio* (Bari: Laterza, 2006).

<sup>279</sup> See especially Marco Burgalassi, 'Il Giovane Croce e il Positivismo', in idem, *Itinerari di una Scienza: La Sociologia in Italia tra Otto e Novecento* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1996), pp. 174-182 [176]: 'In this way, he began by distinguishing "proper sciences" from "improper sciences" and proposing a differentiation between "a description which is classification, which is trying to find the general in the particular, which going beyond the object which one focuses on" from "the description which is reproducing said object in its individuality, since it exists in space and takes place in time"'.<sup>280</sup>

<sup>280</sup> See Garin, *Cronache di Filosofia*, p. 30: 'Now, in the light of an implicit theorising on freedom, which made every framework of positivist conceptions explode, one pointed towards the idea, not only [to find] the postulation of a reality, but the capacity to create the reality thus postulated'.



1800s, could not be transferred to Italy, an industrially underdeveloped land, whose colonial power was weak.<sup>281</sup> Croce's attack against Marxist philosophy, beginning as early as his 1900 *Materialismo Storico ed Economia Marxistica* (*Historical Materialism and Marxist Economy*), was equally met with little opposition. Labriola, the only Italian Marxist thinker of those years, simply did not have a sufficient theoretical backing, and Croce's ideas on Marxism, chiefly its role as pseudoscience in the realm of economy, a utopia in the field of politics and its definition as non-philosophy, went largely uncontested. The first decade of the twentieth century sees Croce returning to his critique of Marxism and Socialism so many times, that a pattern may be found in the object of his critique: firstly he simply negated the validity of surplus capital gain; secondly he argued against the dependency of the cultural and ideal plane of history to the practical one; thirdly, historical materialism was only seen as useful when considering economic factors.<sup>282</sup> Finally, when discussing Hegelian philosophy, Croce's main achievements were those of elevating the role of history, literature and aesthetics, having judged Hegel's approach too abstract and metaphysical.

In a nutshell, Croce's neo-Idealism was a philosophical system which can be summed up, in my opinion, in four major points: the fight against Marxism and Positivism; the backing of the socio-political status quo, which had taken shape after the unification of the country; the defence of different strands of conservative ideologies; the championing of a lay, bourgeois society, protected from the influence of religion.<sup>283</sup> Hegelian neo-Idealism had been conceived in England during the previous

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<sup>281</sup> Historian Guido Pescosolido has written many texts on the subject of Italy's backward economical condition in the early twentieth-century: see Guido Pescosolido, *Agricoltura e Industria nell'Italia Unita* (Bari: Laterza, 1994); idem, *Unità Nazionale e Sviluppo Economico 1750-1913* (Bari: Laterza, 1998); see also Emilio Sereni, *Il Capitalismo nelle Campagne (1860-1900)* (Turin: Einaudi, 1968); Francesco Barbagallo, *Stato, Parlamento e le Lotte Politico-Sociali nel Mezzogiorno, 1900-1914* (Naples: Arte Tipografica, 1976); finally see also Edward Banfield, *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1958).

<sup>282</sup> See Antonio Labriola, 'Come Nacque e Come Morì il Marxismo Teorico in Italia (1895-1900)', in idem, *La Concezione Materialistica della Storia, Nuova ed. con un'Aggiunta di B. Croce sulla Critica del Marxismo in Italia dal 1895 al 1900* (Bari: Laterza, 1942), pp. 89-97; see also Antonio Labriola, *Lettere a Benedetto Croce 1885-1904* (Naples: Istituto Italiano per gli Studi Storici, 1975), pp. 34-42.

<sup>283</sup> Croce was a strong defender of the lay state and opposed the Lateran Pacts of 1929, which brought the Vatican under papal power once more and declared Catholicism to be state

century, but only as one of many philosophical approaches to the modern world. Italy was, in this case, a unique example in which this precise array of philosophical ideas influenced academics, school teachers and the entire scholastic system, and most of all, the young and upcoming generation of thinkers, which Reghini, Papini, Prezzolini and Corradini were all part of.<sup>284</sup>

In his journal *La Critica*, published between 1903 and 1944, Croce would discuss all the above topics, along with others, which he is possibly more famous for: historiography, literary criticism and aesthetics. Within this journal, though, his philosophical ideas were made very clear: in the introduction to the first issue of *La Critica*, Croce writes:

And, since philosophy may not be anything but idealism, he [Croce] is a follower of *idealism*: ready to recognise that new idealism, since it moves more cautiously than before and likes to account for every step it takes, can be easily defined as critical idealism, or as realistic idealism, and even (where with the term metaphysics we refer to arbitrary forms of thought) as anti-metaphysical idealism.<sup>285</sup>

What seemed to be the core idea, which in the beginning brought Croce to be almost idolised by Papini and his circle? If I were to choose one concept it would be the freedom and autonomy of culture, as a manifestation of man in history, devoid of all that is not directly related to the subject.<sup>286</sup> He even enthusiastically mentioned the editors of *Leonardo* in his own journal:

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religion. See Antonio di Mauro, *Il Problema Religioso nel Pensiero di Benedetto Croce* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2001).

<sup>284</sup> See Gianfranco Contini, 'L'Influenza Culturale di Benedetto Croce', in idem, *Altri Esercizi (1942-1971)* (Turin: Einaudi, 1972), pp. 31-70; Karl Vossler, 'Dialettica e Carattere', in *L'Opera Filosofica, Storica e Letteraria di Benedetto Croce* (Bari: Laterza & Figli, 1942), pp. 22-27.

<sup>285</sup> Benedetto Croce, 'Introduzione', *La Critica* 1:1 (1903), p.3: 'E, poiché filosofia non può essere se non idealismo, egli è seguace dell'idealismo: dispostissimo a riconoscere che dell'idealismo nuovo, in quanto procede più cauto di una volta e vuol dar conto d'ogni passo che muove, può ben designarsi come idealismo critico, o come idealismo realistico, e perfino (ove per metafisica s'intendano le forme arbitrarie del pensiero) come idealismo anti-metafisico'.

<sup>286</sup> Croce and Papini corresponded during these years, debating on philosophy, but also on politics and more mundane affairs. In a letter written to Papini, dating 24 March 1903, Croce

The authors of *Leonardo* are bound to each other by a philosophical conception, which is idealism, taken in the form that one of the most delicate French contemporary thinkers gave it, Bergson, as a philosophy of contingency, of freedom, of action. And they are joyous and determined authors, souls that are shaken and inebriated by virtue of ideas; not lowly copiers of other people's articles and sentences to which they add their own frigid comments, for a scholastic and professional purpose, such as usually fill up philosophical journals. This may only help strongly attracting our sympathy.<sup>287</sup>

Reghini, who, as the reader will see, was closely linked to the group of thinkers writing on the journal *Leonardo*, would be clearly influenced by the emerging idealist trends. Just like Papini and Prezzolini, Reghini's contributions to *Leonardo* are deeply imbued with the anti-positivist and idealist attitude that Croce helped spread in Italy.

#### **4. THE FLORENTINE AVANT-GARDE: THE CASE OF *LEONARDO***

##### **4.1. BIRTH AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THE FLORENTINE AVANT-GARDE**

In his *Lo Spaccio dei Maghi* (1929), author Mario Manlio Rossi vividly describes the milieu of Florentine avant-gardists, enflamed by touches of mysticism, neo-Romanticism and Spiritualism:

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commented gleefully on Papini's article 'Chi Sono I Socialisti?', which had been published in *Leonardo*, writing: 'I have read your article "Who are the Socialists?", which contains many sagacious remarks. However, I think you ask too much of Socialists: that they even cease to be [considered] men...', in Archivio Papini, Fondazione Primo Conti, Ref. 19030324.

<sup>287</sup> 'Gli scrittori del *Leonardo* sono legati tra loro da una concezione filosofica ch'è l'idealismo, appreso specialmente nella forma che gli va dando uno dei più fini pensatori contemporanei, il Bergson, quale filosofia della contingenza, della libertà, dell'azione. E sono scrittori vivaci e mordaci, anime scosse ed inebriate per virtù d'idee; non pedestri infiltatori di brani e di periodi altrui con frigidità propri, a scopo scolastico e professionale, quali di solito coloro che riempiono le riviste filosofiche. Ciò non può non attirare fortemente la nostra simpatia'. Benedetto Croce, 'Leonardo', *La Critica*, 1:4 (1903), pp. 287-291 [287].

In the commotion, once in a while some dark illumination. Now, the voluminous whiteness of Besant's hair at the Giubbe Rosse. Now the scientific astrology of an anglo-american named Dodsworth [...]. Over everything, the remarkable height, the Buddhist monk-like face, the lordly and childish kindness of the wizard Reghini, who was probably my best friend- [...].<sup>288</sup>

Rossi's book represents an author's memoir of a particular phase of Florentine history, where new poetics, Wagner and Nietzsche, pragmatism and Croce's neo-idealism, Oriental religions and occultism did, for a short number of years, seem to be able to all go hand-in-hand. A generation of young self-taught intellectuals was on the rise, and the manifestation of their protean ideas was to be found in literary or political journals. We have seen how 1903 saw the birth of Croce's *La Critica* (*The Critique*) and Enrico Corradini's political-nationalist publication *Il Regno* (*The Kingdom*). The collaboration between editors and authors of these various journals would last for the whole decade, as 'between "Hermes", "Leonardo" and "Il Regno" there would figure a mutual collaboration. "Leonardo" in a more philosophical environment, "Il Regno" in a strictly more political capacity forward instances not too far and different from the ones in "Hermes". The three brothers will tend each to their own fields, like good neighbours do'.<sup>289</sup> In a letter to Prezzolini, co-founder Giuseppe Papini, echoing sentiments that were rife in Florentine cultural circles, wrote on 17 November 1902: 'My dearest friend, I am creating a scientific function: I institute an experience. I'm not talking about residues with barbarous names or harmless rabbits, but of men and supermen. I'm talking, as you understand, of "Leonardo"...'.<sup>290</sup> The stance that Papini

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<sup>288</sup> Mario Manlio Rossi, *Lo Spaccio dei Maghi* (Rome: Doxa, 1929), p.4: 'Nel tumulto ogni tanto, qualche tenebrosa illuminazione. Ora, la grassa canizie della Besant alle Giubbe Rosse. Ora, l'astrologia scientifica di un anglo-americano chiamato Dodsworth [...]. Su tutto, l'alta statura, il viso da bonzo, la generosità signorile ed infantile del mago Reghini, che forse fu il mio migliore amico-.

<sup>289</sup> *La Cultura Italiana del '900*, Vol. II, pp. 373-374: 'Tra l' "Hermes" il "Leonardo" ed "Il Regno" sarà scambievolmente collaborazione. Il "Leonardo" in un ambito più strettamente filosofico, "Il Regno" in un ambito più strettamente politico proseguono fini non lontani e non dissimili da quelli dell' "Hermes". I tre fratelli areranno da buoni vicini ciascuno il proprio campo'.

<sup>290</sup> Archivio Papini, Fondazione Primo Conti, Ref. 19021117: 'Carissimo, io sto compiendo una funzione scientifica: istituisco un'esperienza. Non si tratta però di ossidi dai barbari nomi o innocui conigli, ma bensì di uomini e superuomini. Si tratta, come comprendi, del Leonardo...'

and Prezzolini, under the pseudonyms of *Gianfalco* and *Giuliano il Sofista*, took, was uncompromising from the beginning, creating an ‘us versus them’, ‘present versus past’-like climate: while the two were more than happy to host guest authors they endorsed, which, through the years varied from poet and military leader Gabriele d’Annunzio (1863-1938)<sup>291</sup> to philosopher William James (1842-1910)<sup>292</sup>, from author Miguel de Unamuno (1864-1936)<sup>293</sup> to Benedetto Croce<sup>294</sup>, the editors of *Leonardo* were all too eager to express their discontent with what went against their new idea of the world. Through their anonymous column ‘Schermaglie’ (‘Skirmishes’), Papini and Prezzolini would belittle established authors such as Giosué Carducci<sup>295</sup> and Giovanni Pascoli, considered to be too old to be appreciated by the younger generation, or launched attacks against Catholicism, Positivism, the bourgeoisie and the modern world.<sup>296</sup> Having established what *Leonardo* was against, it is imperative to clearly state, in the words of the authors, what they thought of themselves and what instances they were in favour of. In his opening words on the first issue of the journal, Papini clearly explained who this ‘group of youths’ was:<sup>297</sup>

In Life they are pagan and individualists- lovers of intelligence and beauty [...]. In Thought they are personalists and idealists, so as to mean superior to every system and every limit, convinced that every philosophy is nothing but a personal lifestyle- deniers of any other existence outside thought. In Art they love the ideal transfiguration of life and fight against its lower forms.<sup>298</sup>

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<sup>291</sup> Gabriele d’Annunzio, ‘Anniversario Orfico’, *Leonardo* 1:2 (1903), p. 1.

<sup>292</sup> William James, ‘La Concezione della Coscienza’, *Leonardo* 3:3 (1905), p. 77; William James, ‘Le Energie degli Uomini’, *Leonardo* 5:1 (1907), p.1-25.

<sup>293</sup> Miguel de Unamuno, ‘Sobre el Quijotismo’, *Leonardo* 5:1 (1907), pp. 38-45.

<sup>294</sup> Benedetto Croce, ‘Estratto dalla Critica’, *Leonardo* 1-2:1 (1903), p. 21.

<sup>295</sup> Gianfalco, ‘Offese a Giosué Carducci’, *Leonardo* 1:3 (1903), p. 8.

<sup>296</sup> See for example Adolfo de Karolis, ‘Cattolicesimo e Paganesimo’, *Leonardo* 1:8 (1903), p. 7; Giuliano il Sofista, ‘La Malattia del Kantismo’, *Leonardo* 2:3 (1904), p. 35; Gianfalco, ‘Come sta di Salute il Positivismo’, *Leonardo* 3:1 (1905), p. 38.

<sup>297</sup> Gianfalco, ‘Programma Sintetico’, *Leonardo* 1:1, p. 1: ‘gruppo di giovani’.

<sup>298</sup> *Ibid.*, p.1: ‘Nella Vita son pagani e individualisti- amanti della bellezza e dell’intelligenza [...]. Nel Pensiero sono personalisti e idealisti, cioè superiori ad ogni sistema ed a ogni limite, convinti che ogni filosofia non é che un personal modo di vita- negatori di ogni altra esistenza oltre al pensiero. Nell’Arte amano la trasfigurazione ideale della vitae ne combattono le forme inferiori’.



Assagioli, Papini and Vailati at the Leonardo headquarters. © Vallecchi.

Prezzolini's article 'L'Ideale Imperialista', immediately following Papini's introduction, would have certainly enthused a young Reghini, who in the future would make great use of the concepts of intellectual élite, paganism, imperialism, and other terms dear to the Leonardians, within his own weltanschauung. Reghini's collaboration with Papini and Prezzolini is limited to five articles and two reviews, and would only manifest itself in the last year of the journal's publication, when its articles began to touch upon occultist and orientalist themes.<sup>299</sup> A short history of the evolution of the journal is now necessary, if we are to appreciate the speed with which the Florentine avant-garde accepted new ideas before tossing them away and arriving at its final mystic-occultist phase.

#### 4.2. THE THREE LIVES OF *LEONARDO* AND ITS OCCULTIST PHASE

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<sup>299</sup> See Arturo Reghini, 'Giordano Bruno Smentisce Rastignac', *Leonardo* 4:5, pp. 51-4; 'Istituzioni di Scienze Occulte', 4:2, pp. 155-160; 'La Massoneria come Fattore Individuale', 4:4, pp. 297-310; 'Il Punto di Vista dell'Occultismo', 5:2, pp.144-156; the reviews of G. Giordano 'La Pensée Ésotérique de Léonard de Vince', 4:4, pp. 382-384 and of W. Williamson, 'The Great Law', 5:2, pp. 248-250.

*Leonardo* was published every fortnight, starting from 4 January 1903, when it made its debut in selected Florentine bookshops. The first noticeable detail in the first phase of the journal's life is an almost complete absence of political articles. The few that are present are nationalistic in essence and very hostile towards the budding socialist Italian milieu. The reason behind this attitude is explained clearly by sociologist Paolo Casini: 'the answer is to be sought in the myths of positivism which entered after the crisis of *post-Risorgimento* forms of thought: the spread of social-Darwinist theories, the exaltation of the superman, the rise of a more aggressive feeling towards the fatherland and one's social class'.<sup>300</sup> The innate cultural elitism is evident in Prezzolini's 'Imperialismo Intellettuale' ('Intellectual Imperialism'), where he scolds the editors of other philosophical journals reminding them that 'you assert that you are enemies of democracy, bourgeoisie, bourgeois and democratic civilization and progress. Now we are rabid enemies of such things, but we are not nor will be with you [...]. We aim at a bigger and more dignifying prey: at the intellectual imperialism of all the essences of the universe'.<sup>301</sup> This period, coupled with Papini's statement that nothing existed outside the mind, created a fracture between the small group of the *Leonardo* and the few avant-gardists who had come before them. Such attitude, although limited to a magazine, which, at its peak, printed 600 copies, caught the attention of the main philosophers on both side of the Alps, including French philosopher Henri Bergson (1859-1941), whose theories on intuition and vitalism had influenced both Papini and Prezzolini, and therefore fit perfectly in *Leonardo*. Papini and Bergson actually shared a short but amicable correspondence, relating to articles on Bergson's philosophy appearing in the journal.<sup>302</sup>

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<sup>300</sup> Casini, *Origini del Novecento*, p. 51: 'La risposta va cercata sul terreno dei miti positivistic subentrati alla crisi della mentalità postrisorgimentale: la vulgata del darwinismo sociale, l'esaltazione del superuomo, l'insorgere di un più' aggressivo sentimento di patria e appartenenza di classe'.

<sup>301</sup> Giuliano il Sofista, 'Imperialismo Intellettuale', *Leonardo* 1:1, pp. 1-2: 'Voi affermate di essere avversari della democrazia, della borghesia, della civiltà e del progresso democratico e borghese. Ora anche noi siamo feroci nemici di tali cose, ma non siamo né saremo con voi [...]. Aspiriamo ad una preda più vasta e più degna: all'impero intellettuale di tutte le essenze dell'universo'.

<sup>302</sup> See for example a letter from Bergson to Papini dating 21 October 1903: 'J'aurai grand plaisir a lire l'article dont vous voulez bien m'annoncer l'envoi. Je vous en remercie a l'avance, et je vous prie d'agrèer, Monsieur, l'assurance de mes sentiments distingués'. Archivio Papini, Fondazione Primo Conti, Ref. 19031021b.

The second phase of the journal's life coincided with its second series and what Borgese described as a depuration from 'all the dross that weighed it down in the first issues'.<sup>303</sup> The 'dross' it implied referred to the group of aesthetes who had joined *Leonardo* only to jump ship after a short time, in search of the next 'big thing'. Prezzolini, from issue 10 to 14, published in 1904, was free to pursue his new passion, which he shared with his friend and correspondent F.C.S Schiller (1864-1937): Pragmatism. In his three articles all dated 1904, 'La Filosofia che Muore' ('The Dying Philosophy'), 'Morte e Resurrezione della Filosofia' ('Death and Resurrection of Philosophy') and 'Marta e Maria (dalla Contemplazione all'Azione)' ('Martha and Mary (from Contemplation to Action)') Prezzolini made it clear that *Leonardo* had acquired a new direction and a new father figure, who was no longer Croce, but William James.<sup>304</sup> Pragmatism and Bergsonism conveyed the new idea that action was required in order to experience the world, but that it was still an action supported by intellect/intuition over rational theories: in other words, for the Leonardians, there was no epistemological difference between what is and what should be. James briefly took Papini and Prezzolini under his wing, and published articles on the two thinkers and their journal.<sup>305</sup> After 1904, along with their anti-Positivist battle, the 'Florentine Band of Leonardists', as James had called them, operated on a new front against Croce's speculative neo-Idealism. 'Hegelian' had suddenly become an offensive term in the Florentine Pragmatist milieu. James's psychology had won Papini and Prezzolini's hearts, the former, after a Pragmatist conference held in Rome, writing enthusiastically on issue 17 of *Leonardo*:

Today the issue is not whether to choose one name or another, it concerns the augmentation of our power of action [...]. The winner of this Congress, therefore, should have been Pragmatism, which, really, has triumphed in

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<sup>303</sup> Giuseppe Antonio Borgese, 'Leonardo', *Hermes* 1:1 (1904), p. 59.

<sup>304</sup> For comprehensive studies on William James, see the classic Gerald E. Myers, *William James: His Life and Thought* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1986); more recent works include *The Heart of William James*, ed. by Robert D. Richardson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010) and Wesley Cooper, *The Unity of William James's Thought* (Nashville: Vanderbilt Press, 2002).

<sup>305</sup> See William James, 'G. Papini and the Pragmatist Movement in Italy', *The Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Method* 3:13 (1906), pp. 328-341.



Rome in the person of one of its greatest exponents, William James [...].<sup>306</sup>

James's theory of a stream of consciousness and his 1902 classic *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* brought the Leonardians closer and closer to an apology of religion, 'understood as a social and psychological phenomenon which is autonomous from the supposed hegemony of the neo-Idealists, but also as a personal vocation'.<sup>307</sup> During this third and last phase of *Leonardo's* brief existence, as Paolo Casini rightly observes, 'it is not easy to distinguish between "scientific" intent of those researches and its lapses or theosophical, initiatic, esoteric adherence, which were omnipresent in the early XX century [...].<sup>308</sup> The attraction that the occult exercised on the two authors was by this time great. As Papini himself would later write: 'the famous pragmatism didn't really matter to me [...]. I looked beyond. A thaumaturgic dream arose in me. The need, the will to purify and strengthen the spirit in order to enable it to act upon things [...] and to thus reach the miracle, omnipotence'.<sup>309</sup> Reghini, introduced to Papini by future author and politician Giorgio Amendola (1907-1980), immediately felt at home in the new dimension acquired by *Leonardo*. The relationship between Reghini and Papini would last long after the experience of the journal. Papini would write in his diaries that Reghini had asked him, more than once, in the 1910s, to be initiated into his neo-Pythagorean group<sup>310</sup>, and Papini himself had referred to Reghini as not being 'one of the usual *dilettante* charlatans of magical science but he was an acute spirit, enriched by a great

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<sup>306</sup> Gianfalco, 'Gli Psicologi a Roma', *Leonardo* 3:3 (1905), p. 123: 'Oggi non si tratta di scegliere un nome piuttosto che un altro, si tratta di aumentare il nostro potere di agire [...]. Il vincitore del Congresso, dunque, avrebbe dovuto essere il Pragmatismo, il quale, veramente, ha trionfato a Roma nella persona di uno dei più celebri suoi rappresentanti, William James [...]'.

<sup>307</sup> Casini, *Origini del Novecento*, p.164: 'intesa come un fenomeno psicologico e sociale autonomo alla pretesa egemonia dei filosofi neoidealisti, ma anche come vocazione personale'.

<sup>308</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 165: 'non è certo facile distinguere tra gli intenti "scientifici" di quell' dipo di ricerche e le sue ricadute o aderenze di genere teosofico, iniziatico, esoterico, dilaganti all'inizio del secolo XX [...]'.

<sup>309</sup> Papini, *Uomo Finito*, p. 23: 'Il famoso pragmatismo non m'importava [...]. Io guardavo più in là. In me sorgeva allora il sogno thaumaturgico: il bisogno, il desiderio di purificare e rafforzare lo spirito per farlo capace d'agir sulle cose [...] e giungere così al miracolo, all'onnipotenza'.

<sup>310</sup> Papini, *Diario 1900*, p. 237

erudition, sharpened by the exercise of mathematical analysis'.<sup>311</sup> During the last year of the *Leonardo* experience, articles and reviews on occult themes and publications abounded, and Papini publicised Reghini's *Biblioteca*, of which I will write about shortly, in each and every issue of the last series of *Leonardo*. Issue 24 was entirely dedicated to occultism and New Thought, with articles by Papini, Reghini, and anthroposophist Roberto Assagioli (1888-1974). The subject of the articles varied greatly, from Arianism to the *Upanishads*, from Blavatsky to Nineteenth-century occultist Eliphas Levi (1810-1875). The 25<sup>th</sup> and final issue of *Leonardo* marked the end of Papini's and Prezzolini's brief flirtation with occultism too: within the short space of four years, the two avant-gardists had moved from a neo-Idealist stance to James's Pragmatism, ending up among occultists 'from whom we have definitely distanced ourselves', as Papini wrote to Prezzolini.<sup>312</sup>

#### 4.3. REGHINI AND *LEONARDO*

Having established the fact that Papini and Prezzolini did not cherish any enduring experience after their flirtation with occultist circles, it remains to consider what Reghini might have gained by frequenting the avant-gardist milieu. What is clear is that Reghini, Papini and Prezzolini used the same language, the same key words and ideas to captivate their audience, and most of these ideas, individualism, elitism, imperialism, whether intellectual or political, mysticism, occultism, albeit for a brief period, anti-democratic and reactionary impulses, formed the basic core around which all three thinkers built their philosophical edifices. Reghini would have definitely appreciated Prezzolini's passage in his 'Alle Sorgenti dello Spirito' ('At the Sources of Spirit', 1903):

All this stink of phenic acid, of fat and smoke, of common people's sweat, this clanging of machines, this commercial busyboding, this loudness of adverts, are things that not only are tied together rationally, but all hold

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<sup>311</sup> Giovanni Papini and Giuseppe Prezzolini, *Carteggio*, p. 836 : 'uno dei soliti dilettranti ciarlatani delle scienze magiche ma era uno spirito acuto [...], arricchito da una cultura assai vasta, agguerrito dall'esercizio delle analisi matematiche'.

<sup>312</sup> Giovanni Papini and Giuseppe Prezzolini, 'La Fine', *Leonardo* 5:2 (1907), p. 257: 'dai quali ci siamo definitivamente staccati'.

each other's hands, close by virtue of a sentimental tie, which would make us disdain them if they were far away, but makes us hate them because they are near to us.<sup>313</sup>

## 5. REGHINI BETWEEN AVANTGARDE AND THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY

Such was the brief, but intense history of the journal *Leonardo*, the literary and philosophical review where Arturo Reghini debuted as an author. Before analysing Reghini's writings in order to extrapolate his ideas and proclivities at this early stage in his life, it is necessary to cover a fundamental aspect of the Florentine thinker's spiritual path in the first decade of the twentieth century: his ties to the Theosophical Society.

Official evidence of Arturo Reghini's membership within the Society in the early years of the twentieth century is overwhelming,<sup>314</sup> and both biographers of the Florentine thinker, Roberto Sestito and Natale Mario Di Luca, devote entire chapters to this short but rich period in his life, although usually practicing a *caesura* between this youthful period and the following Traditionalist direction Reghini subsequently took. Gennaro d'Uva, arguably the most engaging of Reghini experts wryly refers to Arturo's early years as those of adherence 'to the universalist theoretical premises of theosophism', with the embrace of its major tenets: 'the "universal", a naïve and vulgar theory of reincarnation; the tendency to valorise and master Oriental

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<sup>313</sup> Giuliano il Sofista, 'Alle Sorgenti dello Spirito', *Leonardo* 1:1, p. 4: 'Tutto questo puzzo di acido fenico, di grasso e di fumo, di sudor popolare, questo stridor di macchine, questo affaccendarsi commerciale, questo chiasso di *réclame*, son cose legate non solo razionalmente, ma che si tengon tutte per mano sentimentalmente, che ce le farebbe avere in disdegno se fossero lontane, che ce le fa invece odiare perché sono vicine'.

<sup>314</sup> Research in the old rosters of the Theosophical Society in the early 1900s show that Ida Carlotta Reghini, Arturo's cousin, join the Society in Bologna, on 2 October 1905, while Arturo Reghini had already joined in Turin on 4 June 1902, eventually receiving the status of 'dropped out' on 17 April 1906'. Data collected at *The Theosophical Society General Register*, ed. by Marty Bax, [tsmembers.org](http://tsmembers.org), <http://tsmembers.org/ts-general-register-1875-1942/book-6-10/>, (last accessed September 20 2016).

philosophies; the youthful indulgence towards practical-sentimental postulates [...] of Christian ethics'.<sup>315</sup>

What are we to make of Reghini's period within the folds of the Theosophical society? While, as we have seen, Gennaro d'Uva sees the embrace of the main tenets of Blavatsky's occult system as a youthful error, biographer Roberto Sestito views the Theosophical years as a meaningless stepping stone towards more serious Traditional pursuits;<sup>316</sup> a period in which Reghini already was very aware of Theosophy's ideas and infatuation with the Orient. What I propose in this section is to strike a middle ground between these two theories, and argue that, while d'Uva's approach is correct to some extent, the use of material not employed by Sestito, Di Luca or d'Uva will allow us to picture young Reghini already researching autochthonic forms of occult and religious expression, with the blessings of the higher echelons of the Society, thus portraying a brief but necessary period of absorption of Western and Eastern occult influences, before smoothly moving onto his more focused formulation of his brand of Traditionalism.

### 5.1. THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY IN ITALY

As in most European countries, the Theosophical Society was quickly established in Italy's major cities, most times through the coordinating efforts of distinguished foreign members. The reasons for such a resounding success on Italian soil are to be found in the novel character of Blavatsky's theories, which allegedly based themselves on a renovation of values that blended ancient lore and modern science, effectively providing an alternative to the stifling positivistic outlook that the avant-garde in Florence was against.<sup>317</sup> As Marco Pasi has written: 'One of the fixed points in this longed-for renovation was the critique of the prevailing materialism, countered by the rediscovery of the spiritual values of a primordial and perennial tradition. Such

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<sup>315</sup> Gennaro d'Uva, 'Il Pitagorismo Iniziatico e Magico di Arturo Reghini', pp. 124-5: 'Alle premesse teoretiche universaliste del teosofismo' and 'l'universale, un'ingenua e volgare idea della reincarnazione, la tendenza a valorizzare e a specializzarsi in dottrine orientali, un'indulgenza adolescenziale verso i postulati pratico-sentimentali [...] dell'etica Cristiana'.

<sup>316</sup> Sestito, *Figlio del Sole*, pp. 16-37.

<sup>317</sup> See McNeil Christian Taylor, *Disqualified Knowledge: Theosophy and the Revolt of the Fin de Siècle*. (Middletown, CT: Unpublished thesis, 2013).

values were also seen in contrast to the dogmatism and sclerotisation of the dominant religious faiths'.<sup>318</sup> Not only did the Theosophical Society provide a way out from the positivist-Marxist conundrum, but also provided enquirers with an alternative to Catholicism and other mainstream Christian denominations, which lay in a 'longstanding crisis'.<sup>319</sup> Reghini's virulent anti-Christian stance would have been accepted by many, in a Society founded by a woman, Helena Blavatsky, who had devoted her life to unmasking the wrongdoings of Christianity.<sup>320</sup> The first certain trace of the Theosophical Society in Italy can be found in Rome, when in 1894, Countess Ulla Wachtmeister (1838-1910) made a donation in order to open a Theosophical library in the capital.<sup>321</sup> Four years later, in 1898, although not a founding member of the first Italian section, Reghini would figure amongst the first adherents to the Roman nucleus of the Society. If 1898 is the date provided by Reghini biographer Di Luca, both Pasi and author Paola Giovetti postpone the date of the creation of an official Italian section to 1902.<sup>322</sup> According to Giulio Parise, disciple of Reghini and author of the first biographical note on his master, the Florentine thinker himself was amongst the founding members, although his name does not appear in the rosters of the Theosophical Society.<sup>323</sup> Parise also mentions Reghini founding the publishing house *Ars Regia* with fellow Theosophist Giuseppe Sulli-Rao (1869-1935). *Ars Regia*, whose headquarters Parise located in Turin instead of Milan, would be of pivotal importance in translating foreign Theosophical texts and newer Italian contributions.<sup>324</sup>

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<sup>318</sup> Pasi, 'Theosophy and Anthroposophy', p. 82.

<sup>319</sup> di Luca, *Reghini*, p. 9: 'crisi di lunga data'.

<sup>320</sup> See H.P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine: The Synthesis of Science, Religion, and Philosophy* (Adyar: Theosophical University Press, 1888), pp. 507-8. 'History shows in every race and even tribe, especially in the Semitic nations, the natural impulse to exalt its own tribal deity above all others to the hegemony of the gods; and proves that the god of the Israelites was such a *tribal God*, and no more, even though the Christian Church, following the lead of the "chosen" people, is pleased to enforce the worship of that one particular deity, and to anathematize all the others'.

<sup>321</sup> Pasi, 'Theosophy and Anthroposophy', pp. 87-88.

<sup>322</sup> See Pasi, 'Theosophy and Anthroposophy', p. 88 and Giovetti, *Helena Petrovna Blavatsky*, pp. 163-4.

<sup>323</sup> Parise, 'Nota', p. v.

<sup>324</sup> Among the most important titles published by *Ars Regia*, see H. P. Blavatsky, *Dalle Caverne e dale Giungle dell'Indostan* (Milan: Ars Regia, 1912); Annie Besant, *Teosofia e Vita Umana* (Milan: Ars Regia, 1909); G.R.S. Mead and M.L. Kirby, *Frammenti di una Fede Dimenticata* (Milan: Ars Regia, 1909); C.W. Leadbeater, *Il Piano Astrale* (Milan: Ars Regia, 1913).

The key figure for the establishment of the Theosophical Society in Rome, first, and the rest of Italy, later, was undoubtedly Isabel Cooper-Oakley (1853/4-1914), one of Blavatsky's first disciples in Europe. From 1897, Cooper-Oakley had been present in the Italian Theosophical milieu, helping different cities network more effectively and representing a strong *fulcrum*, albeit sometimes lacking the social niceties usually attributed to the English upper-class, around which early enthusiasts rallied.<sup>325</sup> Thanks to her the most prestigious international members of the Society lectured widely in Italy, including figures such as Henry Steel Olcott (1832-1907), Curupullumage Jinarajadasa (1875-1953), Annie Besant (1947-1933) and Charles Leadbeater (1854-1934). Notwithstanding Cooper-Oakley's uncompromising demeanour and resolute character, many documents attest to the benevolence of the Italian Theosophists in her regards.<sup>326</sup> A special friendship with Isabel Cooper-Oakley seems to have been entertained by a relative of Arturo Reghini's, Ida Carlotta (n.d.). It was Ida Carlotta Reghini who took it upon herself to write the obituary on the national Theosophical bulletin, when Cooper-Oakley died in Hungary in 1914. The enthusiasm and love for her transpires at every line penned: 'she was among those who with their magic wand let water flow from the rocks, and this magic wand was her will, her unbound devotion to the cause of the Theosophical Society, to her Master'. Moreover, 'in her you could feel the reflection of those heroic times, which demanded an absolute and complete dedication of one's being. We owe it to these great workers, if today we may lean on and take respite upon the great truths of Theosophy'.<sup>327</sup>

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<sup>325</sup> The international heads of the Theosophical Society were very weary of the difficulties Cooper-Oakley would have encountered on her mission in Italy; see 'Italy', in *The Theosophist* XXII:4 (1901), p. 246. 'The Italians are so inexperienced as a people, in methodical conduct of business, and Theosophy, as a system, is so new to them, that Mrs. Cooper-Oakley, is sure to find in her way many obstacles that will have to be removed before the movement can have free scope to spread'.

<sup>326</sup> The minutes of the 'First Convention of the Italian Section of the Italian Section of the Theosophical Society', republished in 2002, exactly one-hundred years since the event in *Rivista Italiana di Teosofia*, 68:2 (2002), pp. 5-11, are a clear indicator of this.

<sup>327</sup> Ida Carlotta Reghini, 'Isabel Cooper-Oakley', *Società Teosofica: Bollettino della Sezione Italiana* 14:3 (1914), p. 113-4. 'Era tra coloro che facevano sgorgare acqua dalle rocce con la sua bacchetta magica, e la sua bacchetta magica era la sua volontà, la sua smisurata devozione alla causa della Società Teosofica, al suo Maestro', and 'in lei si avvertiva il riflesso di quei tempi eroici, che richiedevano un'assoluta e completa dedizione del proprio essere. Dobbiamo a questi gran lavoratori, se oggi possiamo appoggiarci e trovare ristoro alle grandi verità della Teosofia'.

## 5.2. THE THEOSOPHICAL LIBRARY

If Rome and Milan certainly witnessed Reghini's involvement with the dissemination of Theosophical ideas, it is in his native Florence that he really became a major asset to the Society. In 1903, thanks to the financial aid of Theosophist Giulia H. Scott (nd.), Reghini was able to open and manage his own Theosophical library, amassing a great number of volumes on alchemy, Freemasonry and Theosophy in a very short time: by 1906, the library offered 2000 volumes, and by 1908 the number of available books had risen to 5000.<sup>328</sup> The times in which Reghini started his activity as organiser of conferences at the *Biblioteca Teosofica* coincided with great social and cultural turmoil. As Guido Ferrando had written in the journal *La Voce*: 'the Theosophical Society arose when materialism in both philosophy and science had reached its higher status; and when already one could witness the first and isolated protests against the extremely novel doctrine which reduced all life to a mechanism and negated any free activity to the spirit'.<sup>329</sup> Ferrando's thoughts inexorably posit the Florentine avant-garde close to the Theosophical Society, and Reghini was to be one of the focal points of contact between the two. Reghini was not alone in his desire to reaffirm the fundamental role of the spirit: his influence on the younger generation of intellectuals who met at the *Giubbe Rosse* café was fundamental.<sup>330</sup> Along with the already mentioned Papini and Prezzolini, Reghini also rubbed shoulders with other frequenters of this particular café: among them Giovanni Amendola, journalist and member of the Theosophical Society, and Ardengo Soffici (1879-1964), painter and future Minister during Mussolini's first government. It was at the *Giubbe Rosse* that a violent fistfight erupted in 1913 between members of the Florentine literary avant-garde and Filippo Tommaso Marinetti (1876-1944) and his following of Futurist artists:<sup>331</sup> this intellectual milieu was the ideal surrounding for Reghini, the *Giubbe Rosse* café being described by a scholar as 'a place where mysteries were at hand', at which one could see 'the closed spaces of magical idealism, Evolian initiatic movements, in which one

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<sup>328</sup> See Papini, *Passato Remoto, 1885-1914*, ed. by Anna Casini Paszkowski (Florence: Ponte delle Grazie, 1994), p. 102.

<sup>329</sup> Guido Ferrando, in Simona Cigliana, *Futurismo Esoterico*, p. 34: 'La Società Teosofica sorse quando il materialismo nella filosofia e nella scienza aveva raggiunto il suo grado più alto; e quando già cominciavano le prime e isolate proteste contro la novissima dottrina che riduceva tutta la vita a un meccanismo e negava ogni attività libera dello spirito'.

<sup>330</sup> VVAA, *Ritorno*, p. 13.

would talk of pagan imperialism, of superior races destined to dominion and all the Nietzschean manias of traditional esotericism vibrated'.<sup>332</sup> The periods just quoted, penned by avant-garde journals expert Marino Biondi, really exemplify the close tie between far reaching avant-gardist ideas and esoteric traditions deeply rooted in the past, which was a common trait among the young *élite intellectuelle* of the day. In writing about this historical period, and Reghini's library in particular, Simona Cigliana writes:

one ends up asking oneself what part and how big of a part did Arturo Reghini's [...] Library have in the circulation of some ideas which then seemed to radicate themselves in Italian culture, in the shape of key words or ideas, the same which went to enrich the substratum of much "irrationalism" and "idealistic" confusion, until they constituted, on the one hand, some of the ideological directives for the involution of Italian politics, on the other some of the leitmotifs of the literary-avant-gardist elaboration of Futurism.<sup>333</sup>

Due to disagreements with Cooper-Oakley and the then leader of the Society Annie Besant, the name of the library was changed to *Biblioteca Filosofica* in 1905: Amendola became the new chief librarian and organiser of conferences,<sup>334</sup> thus allowing Reghini more time to write and present his own papers, such as *Il Dominio dell'Anima (The Dominion of the Soul)* of 1907 and *La Vita dello Spirito (The Way of the Spirit)* of the same year, and *Per una Concezione Spirituale della Vita (For a Spiritual Understanding of Life)* of 1908. Within the confines of the Florentine avant-garde stirrings, including Papini and Prezolini's *Scapigliatura* and the Futurist artistic

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<sup>332</sup> Marino Biondi, 'Hermet, Epica e Liturgia delle Riviste', in Augusto Hermet, *La Ventura delle Riviste (1903-1940)*, 2nd ed. (Florence: Vallecchi, 1987), p. 17: 'un luogo dove i misteri erano a portata di mano' and 'gli spazi chiusi dell'idealismo magico, movimenti iniziatici Evoliani, in cui si poteva parlare di imperialismo pagano, di razze superiori destinate a dominare e vibravano tutte le manie Nietzscheane del tradizionalismo esoterico'.

<sup>333</sup> Cigliana, *Futurismo Esoterico*, p. 57: 'si finisce col chiedersi quale e quanta parte abbia avuto la Biblioteca [...] di Arturo Reghini nella circolazione di alcune idee che sembrarono poi radicarsi nella cultura italiana, sotto forma di parole o idee-chiave, le stesse che andarono a fecondare il substrato di tanto irrazionalismo e di tante confusioni idealistiche, fino a costituire, da una parte, alcune delle linee ideologiche della involuzione politica italiana, dall'altra alcuni *leitmotifs* della elaborazione letterario-avanguardistica del futurismo'.

<sup>334</sup> Nicola Lisi, *Parlata dalla Finestra di Casa*, p. 113. and Paolo Casini, *Alle Origini del Novecento. Leonardo, 1903-1907*, p. 161.



and literary movements, Reghini was a central figure, to whom many intellectuals turned for an opinion or an endorsement.<sup>335</sup> Never again, in my opinion, would his influence on mainstream culture be so incisive. It is significant that it is in his brief Theosophical period that we have most references to Reghini in other authors' works, thus giving us a fleshed out and more human depiction of the Florentine Theosophist. According to Augusto Hermet, 'Reghini belonged to the kind of aristocrat of great culture, an ideal image for young people wishing to elevate themselves above the masses [...], who made of aristocracy a programmatic point of their intellectual journey'.<sup>336</sup> Nicola Lisi gives us a major insight into the man's metaphysical interests: 'Reghini, and by now most of us know it, was a philosopher/mathematician following the example of the ancients. A Pythagorean, he liked to define himself'.<sup>337</sup> Coveted by the day's cultural intelligentsia, Reghini exerted a great influence on the young generation of anti-positivist thinkers, who were all too ready to assimilate the 'aristocratic and antidemocratic elements in Reghini's occult views'.<sup>338</sup> It seems that an early strain of antidemocratic feeling and a belief in the superiority of an elitist form of occultism was already present in Reghini during his days as a member of the Theosophical Society.

### 5.3. THE ROOTS OF ROMAN TRADITIONALISM IN THEOSOPHY?

To the scholar of *fin de siècle* occultism, it comes as no surprise that Theosophy postulated the existence of a perennial philosophy, which, harkening back through the ages, could provide the Theosophist with a pristine understanding of an immutable sacred wisdom. In Theosophical circles, the idea of a *philosophia perennis* acquired the names of Ancient Wisdom or Wisdom-Religion.<sup>339</sup> The efforts of the Theosophical Society in bridging the gap between Western and Eastern ideas of

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<sup>335</sup> Giovanni Papini, 'Biblioteca Filosofica', *Leonardo* 4:4 (1906), pp. 170 ff.: Papini describes Reghini's library as 'one of the best signs of an intellectual reawakening of Florence and of the rising interest in Italy for the problems of the spirit'.

<sup>336</sup> Hermet, *La Ventura*, p. 17: 'Reghini apparteneva al tipo di aristocratico di gran cultura, un'immagine ideale per i giovani che volessero elevarsi sopra le masse [...], che facevano dell'aristocrazia un punto programmatico del loro percorso intellettuale'.

<sup>337</sup> Lisi, *Parlata*, p. 112: 'Reghini, e ormai i più lo sanno, era un filosofo/matematico che seguiva l'esempio degli antichi. Un Pitagorico, amava definirsi'.

<sup>338</sup> Cigliana, *Futurismo Esoterico*, p. 66: 'elementi aristocratici e antidemocratici'.

<sup>339</sup> H. P. Blavatsky, *The Key to Theosophy* (Mumbai: Theosophy Company, 1887), p. 5.

knowledge effectively made Eastern theories known in the West, A.P. Sinnett's (1840-1921) *Esoteric Buddhism* (1883) being an early example of this trend.<sup>340</sup> Early in the Society's history, the original interest had been in hermetic philosophy and Western occult lore, and Hindu and Buddhist doctrines encountered in the East were seen as 'belonging to the same corpus of writings that included the *Corpus Hermeticum*, or Giordano Bruno's writings'.<sup>341</sup> The mention of Bruno is here of vital importance: Reghini's first ever article on *Leonardo* 'Giordano Bruno smentisce Rastignac' (1906) is a paean to the esoteric and mystical aspects of the Nolan philosopher, who had until then been hailed as a champion of 'free thought and modern science'.<sup>342</sup>

Reghini's brief involvement with Theosophy has been readily dismissed by biographers and scholars alike as a 'necessary mistake', given the occultist's youth and Theosophy being at the time the most approachable access to the world of occultism, of idealism and spiritual transformations. Traditionalist circles did not value Theosophy greatly, and between René Guenon and Arturo Reghini's correspondence, there is no evidence to show that the Italian disagreed with the French thinker's vitriolic remarks on Blavatsky's movement. Even Julius Evola would have only words of praise for Reghini for having advised him against joining the Society.<sup>343</sup> Every residue of his past connection with Cooper-Oakley and her circle seems to be swept away by his initiation on behalf of Amedeo Rocco Armentano (1886-1966) into the folds of the purportedly ancient *Schola Italica* in 1910.<sup>344</sup> In successive years, mentions of the Theosophical Society are scarce to say the least. But all is not what it seems.

In the light of newly found material, it is my intention to discuss the extent to which Reghini's Theosophical past influenced his future thoughts and actions. I certainly believe that, even though Reghini did not disdain the occasional jab at the

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<sup>340</sup> Alfred Percy Sinnett, *Esoteric Buddhism* (London: 1883). For a general approach to the subject, see Godwin, *Theosophical Enlightenment*, pp. 363-79.

<sup>341</sup> Quoted in Isaac Lubelsky, 'Mythological and Real Race Issues in Theosophy', in *Handbook of the Theosophical Current*, pp. 335-356 [337].

<sup>342</sup> Reghini, 'Giordano Bruno'. The quote is from Marco Pasi, 'Theosophy and Anthroposophy', p. 92.

<sup>343</sup> Julius Evola, *Il Cammino del Cinabro*, third expanded edition (Rome: Mediterranee, 2014 [1963]) pp.143-144.

<sup>344</sup> Renato del Ponte, 'L'Iniziazione Pitagorica di Arturo Reghini in Apuania', *Arthos* 20 (2014), pp. 7-16.

Society as an institution, he nevertheless started his journey towards the ancient tenets of Roman traditions before his meeting with Armentano, as a member of the Theosophical Society. During the first years of Theosophical presence in Rome, and this fundamental aspect has been highlighted only by Marco Pasi to this date, members of the Society embarked on the research for local roots of esoteric knowledge that could work alongside the Eastern approaches more typical of the Society. Such endeavour is seen as ‘connected to the concept of a Hermetic-Italic school that took shape during these years in Giuliano Kremmerz’s (ps. of Ciro Formisano, 1861–1930) circle, and to that of a Pythagorean-Italic tradition that was later elaborated by Reghini and his associates’.<sup>345</sup> Although I do not agree completely with Pasi about the actual extent of Theosophical influence on Giuliano Kremmerz, I do think that such an important statement cannot be underestimated. During the First Annual Congress of the Federation of the European Sections of the Theosophical Society, held in 1904, while Reghini presented a paper *Il Meccanismo della Visione e la Quarta Dimensione (The Mechanism of Vision and the Fourth Dimension)*, Decio Calvari (1863-1937), Theosophist and future secretary general of the Italian parliament, made the public aware of an important initiative to take place in Italy in the near future:

Another kind of work has begun, which will be further developed in the next autumn. It consists in the study of our [that is, Italian] mystical tradition, which offers such a great number of points in common with our [that is, of the Theosophical Society] teaching, as the researches on the great authors and thinkers of the Renaissance demonstrates. Through the creation of a philosophical-religious library and a Society for the creation of Public Conferences, we will try to bring back to life, in Florence, the great neo-platonic idea that in the fifteenth-century boasted representatives such as Marsilio Ficino and Leonardo da Vinci.<sup>346</sup>

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<sup>345</sup> Pasi, ‘Theosophy and Anthroposophy’, p. 91.

<sup>346</sup> Decio Calvari, ‘Résumé du Mouvement Théosophique en Italie’, in *Transactions of the First Annual Congress of the Federation of European Sections of the Theosophical Society*, ed. by Johan Van Manen (Brill: Leiden, 1906), pp. 381-2: ‘Un autre travail a aussi débuté et aura un plus grand développement dans l’automne prochain. Il consiste dans l’étude particulière de notre tradition mystique qui a de si nombreux points de contact avec notre enseignement, comme le démontrèrent les recherches dans les œuvres des grands écrivains et penseurs de la Renaissance. Par l’institution d’une Bibliothèque Philosophique Religieuse et d’une Société

I realise that Marsilio Ficino and Leonardo da Vinci are hardly the precursors of a Pythagorean school of thought, which Reghini later claimed to represent: but, after all, Reghini himself writes that ‘the philosophy of the schola italica left its indelible and strong mark in all of the following platonic and neo-platonic philosophy, and therefore on all classical thought’.<sup>347</sup> Nevertheless a new and more nuanced understanding of Reghini’s years is necessary, and the years leading up to his initiation into the Pythagorean *Schola* in 1910 represent, in my eyes, a progression towards what would become known as Roman Traditionalism, which had already started in the Theosophical Society. I will now analyse Reghini’s writings from the period considered in this chapter and try and highlight, the genuine avant-gardist and equally fervid Theosophical enthusiasm, which characterised this period of his life.

#### 5.4. REGHINI’S THEOSOFICAL WRITINGS

A brief analysis of the pseudonyms chosen when writing articles during his Leonardian/Theosophical period, probably would suffice to show Reghini’s genuine interest in Theosophical lore. In ‘Mors Osculi’ (Death by a Kiss, 1906) he signs his contribution as *Alaya*, and in ‘Istituzioni di Scienza Occulta’ (Institutions of Occult Sciences, 1906) Reghini chooses the name *Svasamdevana*.<sup>348</sup> The word *Alaya* is a term that appears recurrently in Blavatsky’s *The Secret Doctrine* (1888) and *The Voice of the Silence* (1889).<sup>349</sup> First mentioned in the *Stanzas of Dzyan*, *Alaya* signifies unbound consciousness<sup>350</sup> and in Blavatsky’s *The Voice of the Silence* (1889) we read: ‘behold how like the moon, reflected in the tranquil waves, Alaya is reflected by the small and by the great, is mirrored in the tiniest atoms, yet fails to reach the heart of

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pour Conférence Publiques, on essaiera de revivifier a Florence la grand e idée neo-platonicienne qui a eu dans le 15iesme siècle de si grands représentants tells que Marsilio Ficino et Leonardo da Vinci’.

<sup>347</sup> Arturo Reghini, ‘Le Basi Spirituali della Massoneria’, in *Rassegna Massonica* 8-9 (1923), reprinted in *Paganesimo, Pitagorismo, Massoneria* (Furnari: Mantinea, 1984), p. 34: la filosofia della schola italica lasciò il suo marchio forte e indelebile in tutta la successiva filosofia platonica e neo-platonica, e quindi su tutto il pensiero classico’.

<sup>348</sup> Alaya [Arturo Reghini], ‘Mors Osculi’, *Leonardo* 4:2 (1906), pp.142-3; Svasamvedana [Arturo Reghini], ‘Istituzioni di Scienza Occulta’, *Leonardo* 4:5 (1906), pp. 156-160.

<sup>349</sup> H. P. Blavatsky, *The Voice in the Silence: Being Chosen Fragments from the Book of Golden Precepts* (London & New York: Theosophical Publishing Company, 1889).

<sup>350</sup> Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, p. 29.

all'.<sup>351</sup> Reghini's 'Mors Osculi' is the depiction of the journey of the Soul, after its fall; after encountering the elements, the sun, the moon, a panpipe playing a mystical tune, Soul is finally at rest and may sleep for seven eternities. In the article, Reghini mentions the heroic frenzies (*eroici furori*) of *Anima*, the Soul, and this has brought some authors to attach great importance to Giordano Bruno's (1548-1600) philosophy,<sup>352</sup> and to the role it would play in Reghini's future development of an idea of unbroken initiates propagating the Roman *prisca sapientia*, in the company of 'Virgil, Dante, Campanella, Mazzini'.<sup>353</sup> In my opinion, the reference to Bruno in this passage owes more to Reghini's early view of Bruno as an occultist, opposed to the then common view of the Nolan philosopher of a martyr for a modern view of the world. Another reason for his inclusion within the article is that Annie Besant, leader of the Society after the death of Blavatsky and with whom Reghini corresponded, was firm in her belief of being the reincarnation of Giordano Bruno.<sup>354</sup> What 'Mors Osculi' more closely reminds the reader of is the classics of Romantic *Naturphilosophie* and the vitalist approach of German *Lebensphilosophie*, which would find a welcome space in the last series of *Leonardo: Anima* in Reghini is closely reminiscent of Ludwig Klages's (1872-1956) *Seele's* struggle to find its place in a modern logocentric world;<sup>355</sup> furthermore, the personification of the soul within the narrative brings to mind the epic poems of another member of the Munich cosmic circle: Albert Mombert (1872-1942). Reghini's *Anima*, its trials and tribulations can be seen to closely parallel Mombert's *Aeon*, in his *Aeon: Dramatische Trilogie* (1907-11), with the music played by a panpipe and the 'seven eternities of slumber' echoing closely the post-Nietzschean sensibility of the Munich circle.<sup>356</sup>

In the second article I will briefly analyse, 'Istituzioni di Scienza Occulta', Reghini uses the pseudonym *Svasamvedana*: this Sanskrit term is usually utilised to

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<sup>351</sup> Blavatsky, *The Voice in the Silence*, p. 24

<sup>352</sup> See d'Uva, 'Il Pitagorismo Magico', p. 132-3; and Sestito, *Figlio del Sole*, pp. 17-9.

<sup>353</sup> Reghini, 'Imperialismo Pagano', p. 70-85.

<sup>354</sup> See, for example, T.H. Meyer and Elisabeth Vreede, *The Bodhisattva Question: Krishnamurti, Steiner, Tomberg and the Mystery of the Twentieth Century Master* (Forest Row: Temple Lodge Publishing, 2006).

<sup>355</sup> See Nitzan Lebovic, *The Philosophy of Life and Death: Ludwig Klages and the Rise of a Nazi Biopolitics* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013) and Ludwig Klages, *Der Geist als Widersacher der Seele*, 4 Vols. (Leipzig: J.A. Barth, 1929-32).

<sup>356</sup> Alfred Mombert, *Aeon: Dramatische Trilogie* (Berlin: Schuster & Loeffler, 1907-11); see also Raymond Furness, *Zarathustra's Children: a Lost Generation of German Writers* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2000), pp. 49-75.

express self-awareness or the reflexive nature of awareness. Of course, Blavatsky and other Theosophists after her, had explained the term in their works, and Reghini probably borrowed this *nom de plume* from English Theosophical writings. A passage where the term is used may be found in Blavatsky's *Fall of Ideas*, where she compares the teachings of the Gnostics to those of the Buddha: 'the solution of the two systems was identical in that they traced the Cause of Sorrow to Ignorance, and to remove this, pointed out the Path to Self-knowledge. *The Mind was to instruct the Mind: "self-analyzing reflection" was to be the Way.* The Material Mind (Kāma-Manas) was to be purified and so become one with the Spiritual Mind (Buddhi-Manas)'.<sup>357</sup> This self-awareness, according to Reghini, was to be achieved by yogic practises and meditation. We know of Reghini actually practicing these techniques taught by the Theosophical Society from a letter Annie Besant had sent to the Florentine occultist from her lodgings in Benares. The letter is dated 24 April 1903, and is a response to Reghini's complaints for physical pain while performing his practices. Besant's advice is not too clear: 'the pain you are feeling demonstrates that you are not ready to free the energies concentrated to arrive to the higher plexus [...]. You should go back to simple meditation, continuing to train the mind, the body. After this, time will come when you will be able to exit the body at no risk'.<sup>358</sup> Not only does this letter give proof of Reghini's attempts at following the series of exercises prescribed by Theosophical theories, but it also indicates that, in knowing and corresponding directly with Annie Besant, he must have been a most-influential and well-known member of the Italian Theosophical community and possibly a member of the Esoteric School section of the Society, whose membership is still today secret; his efforts to make occult teachings available to a wider public were easily discernible in his writings on this period: '[We must] draw a bridge above the abyss that separates modern thought with its scientific-positivist prejudices from the old and yet always new esoteric thought: tear away the reader from a wrong and ordinary idea of life and initiate him into the spirit of occultism'.<sup>359</sup>

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<sup>357</sup> Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, 'The Fall of Ideas', in *The Collected Works Vol. XII* (London: Theosophical Publishing House, 1980), p. 40-45 [40].

<sup>358</sup> Annie Besant, Letter of 24 April 1903, in *Ignis*, 5 (1992), p. 83.

<sup>359</sup> Svasamvedana [Arturo Reghini], 'Istituzioni di Scienza Occulta', p. 160: 'Dobbiamo tracciare un ponte sopra l'abisso che separa il pensiero moderno con i suoi pregiudizi scientifico-positivisti dal vecchio ma sempre nuovo pensiero esoterico: strappare via il lettore da un'errata e ordinaria concezione della vita e iniziarlo nello spirito dell'occultismo'.

In the three lectures given by Reghini at the *Biblioteca Teosofica/Filosofica*, namely *La Vita dello Spirito (The Life of the Spirit)* (1907), *Il Dominio dell'Anima (Control of the Soul)* (1907) and *Per una Concezione Spirituale della Vita (For a Spiritual Understanding of Life)* (1908), the influence of Theosophical teachings is also omnipresent.<sup>360</sup> In *Dominio*, after having defined the essential questions of the talk as concerning 'the problem of death, of nature and of the survival of the soul',<sup>361</sup> the author goes on to describe the inadequacy of both science and religion with the core problems of mankind, highlighting possible methods reminiscent of the first Theosophers' writings:<sup>362</sup>

But there is still another category of souls, whose thirst for knowledge is not satisfied by either springs [ie. Science or Religion]. These souls, and they are more numerous than you think, do not deem it necessary to choose between science and religion; they do not judge either indispensable, but think of them as inadequate, either separate or united, to extinguish the divine thirst for knowing completely.<sup>363</sup>

He then goes on, quoting *The Light on the Path* and praises the virtues of yogic practice in order to still the mind and enhance the soul's capacities; post-Theosophical Reghini would no doubt use another terminology altogether, trying to fit the introspective aspects of yoga within a Pythagorean and Western frame, but in 1907 he exhorted his audience to 'concentrate our [energies] on the evolution of our

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<sup>360</sup> See Arturo Reghini, 'Il Dominio Dell'Anima', in *Paganesimo, Pitagorismo, Massoneria*, pp. 1-12; idem, 'La Vita dello Spirito', in *Paganesimo, Pitagorismo, Massoneria*, pp.13-25; idem, 'Per una Concezione Spirituale della Vita', in Arturo Reghini, Giuliano Balbino and Guido Ferrante, *Per una Concezione Spirituale della Vita* (Firenze: Seeber, 1908).

<sup>361</sup> Reghini, 'Il Dominio dell'Anima', p. 2: 'il problema della morte, della natura e della sopravvivenza dell'anima'.

<sup>362</sup> See William Q. Judge, *The Ocean of Theosophy* (New York: The Path, 1893), p. 1: 'Theosophy is that ocean of knowledge which spreads from shore to shore of the evolution of sentient beings; unfathomable in its deepest parts, it gives the greatest minds their fullest scope, yet, shallow enough at its shores, it will not overwhelm the understanding of a child. . . . Embracing both the scientific and the religious, theosophy is a scientific religion and a religious science'.

<sup>363</sup> Reghini, 'Il Dominio dell'Anima', p. 3: 'Ma vi é ancora un'altra categoria di anime, la cui sete di conoscenza non è saziata da nessuna delle due fonti. Queste anime, e sono più numerose di quanto pensate, non pensano sia necessario scegliere tra scienza e religione; non giudicano indispensabili nessuna delle due, ma le considerano inadeguate, separate o insieme, a spegnere completamente quella sete di conoscere'.

conscience, both following with will, faith and heroic frenzy the natural impulse, and the various techniques of evolution and of yoga'.<sup>364</sup> The conclusion of *Il Dominio* is a masterpiece in Theosophical rhetoric: leaping beyond the present limits of human consciousness one partakes in, and of universal consciousness, the individual of the whole, the one, mighty Brahman, of whom 'only silence expresses the ineffable name'.<sup>365</sup> In *La Vita dello Spirito*, the arguments are similar, and yoga and meditative techniques are advised so that 'each one of us may try and reach the vast Ocean on Consciousness and feel it's immense immanence'.<sup>366</sup> Reghini's knowledge of Theosophy and Eastern doctrines is palpable when he mentions the poet and philosopher Sadhak Ramprasad Sen (c. 1723 – c. 1775), a shakta poet who 'made the banks of the Ganges resound, a century ago, with the sound of his *vina*':<sup>367</sup> in describing the goddess Kali and the god Shiva, the latter's use of his third eye and the former's role as destructor of nature, Reghini shows he possessed more than just rudiments of Oriental lore. *Per una Concezione Spirituale della Vita* proceeds on the same trajectory as his previous talks: yogic practice, reincarnation, Oriental influences are all woven together in a Theosophical tapestry, which previous studies of Reghini had vastly underestimated.

## 5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Having devoted three sections on Reghini's philosophical background, on the elitist milieu frequented during the years of the Florentine *Scapigliatura* and on his prolific period within the folds of the Theosophical society, it is easier to assess the fundamental importance of the first ten years of the twentieth century in the shaping of Reghini's thoughts and dealings with different milieus of the day: it is safe to say that Arturo Reghini's *Leonardo* and Theosophical years deserved a more thorough enquiry than previously attempted: it could be argued that, outside of the Pythagorean and masonic circles, in which he would be a prime figure, the first decade of the twentieth

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<sup>364</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9: 'concentriamo le nostre [energie] sull'evoluzione della nostra coscienza, seguendo sia con la volontà, la fede e gli eroici furori l'impulso naturale, sia le varie tecniche evolutive e dello yoga'.

<sup>365</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12: 'solo il silenzio ne esprime il nome ineffabile'.

<sup>366</sup> Reghini, 'La Vita dello Spirito', p. 16-7: 'ciascuno di noi possa provare a raggiungere il vasto Oceano della Coscienza e possa sentire la sua immane immanenza'.

<sup>367</sup> *Ibid.*, 19: 'fece risuonare le sponde del Gange, un secolo fa, con la sua *vita*'.



century was the timespan in which Reghini really made an impact on the wider occult milieu, the blossoming avant-garde movements and the Florentine group of bohemian intellectuals who gathered at the *Giubbe Rosse* café. It is in these years that Reghini made ties with intellectuals such as Papini, Prezzolini, Amendola, Aniceto del Massa (1898-1975), Augusto Hermet (1889-1954), Nicola Lisi (1893-1975), Elemire Zolla, who all mention Reghini in their memoirs, describing him as an exceptional man of his age.<sup>368</sup> As I have shown, directives within the Theosophical Society might have prompted an early interest in the Western, and more specifically Italian tradition, and there is no reason to think, in the light of my enquiry, that Reghini's first foray into the world of esotericism was not, a previously dismissed idea, deeply rooted within the tenets of Theosophy and that this period of his life should be seen as an important, if not fundamental segment thereof. His Theosophical initiation to the realm of autochthone forms of religion and all the paradoxes of a reactionary avant-garde, of a modern Traditionalism which most of Florence's cultural elite were conscious instigators of, are traits that would characterise Reghini throughout his life. It seems clear by now that his aristocratic, elitist worldview, his love for Roman traditions, his Imperialist political beliefs, all stemmed very early, from the avant-garde *Scapigliatura* of the *Giubbe Rosse* and from his work within Theosophical Society. In their youthful and often boisterous meetings at literary café, a new vision of life, the arts and occultism was beginning to become clearer and clearer: the creation of an occult think tank destined to few, who would then stir the masses through the use of their acquired powers; the creation of an occult coterie, which would champion aristocracy, imperialism and the ideals of ancient Rome inherited from the *Risorgimento*. As we shall see in the following chapter, Reghini would soon meet the person who would help him manifest his antimodern aspirations.

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<sup>368</sup> Of the works not yet quoted previously, Aniceto del Massa, *Pagine Esoteriche* (Lavis: La Finestra, [1928] 2001); Giovanni Amendola, *Carteggio 1897-1909* (Bari: Laterza, 1986).

## CHAPTER 4:

### THE *SCHOLA ITALICA* AND THE *RITO FILOSOFICO ITALIANO* (1910 – 1914): INITIATION AND INVENTION OF TRADITION IN MODERN ITALY

‘Oh, great spirit of Pythagoras [...],  
forgive the poor profane who defile  
initiation, turning it into empty  
choreography, forgive them!’<sup>369</sup>

Eduardo Frosini

#### 1. SCOPE OF THE CHAPTER

The scope of this chapter is to cover a period in Reghini’s life that is essential for two reasons: firstly, and most importantly, it marked his initiation by his mentor Amedeo Rocco Armentano into the alleged neo-Pythagorean occult group of the *Schola Italica*; secondly, because, through the position of leadership gained within the *Rito Filosofico Italiano* (*Italian Philosophical Rite*),<sup>370</sup> an Italian autochthone Rite,<sup>371</sup> Reghini and Armentano planned to rid Italian Freemasonry from its modern, secularised and egalitarian aspects in order to bring back the tenants of the *Mos*

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<sup>369</sup> Eduardo Frosini, *Massoneria Italiana e Tradizione Iniziatica* (Pescara, Ettore Croce, 1911), p. 153: ‘Oh, Grande spirito di Pitagora, [...] perdona I poveri pofani che profanano l’iniziazione, riducendola a vuota coreografia, perdonali!’.

<sup>370</sup> The definitive study on the *Rito Filosofico Italiano* is Roberto Sestito, *Storia del Rito Filosofico Italiano e dell’Ordine Orientale Antico e Primitivo di Memphis e Misraim* (Florence: Libreria Chiari, 2003); other studies which briefly touch upon the history of the *Rito Filosofico Italiano* are A. Aldo Mola, *Storia della Massoneria Italiana dale Origini ai Giorni Nostri* (Milan: Bompiani, 1992), p. 328-29; Gastone Ventura, *I Riti Massonici di Misraim e Memphis* (Todi: Atanor, 1980); Arturo Reghini, *Considerazioni*.

<sup>371</sup> According to the scholar of Freemasonry Arturo de Hoyos, Rites may be defined as masonic systems, explained as ‘the linking of masonic degrees for initiation or instruction, under administrative or governmental authority’. See Arturo de Hoyos, ‘Masonic Rites and Systems’, in *Handbook of Freemasonry*, ed. by Henrik Bogdan and Jan Snoek (Leiden: Brill, 2014), pp. 355-377.

*Maiorum*,<sup>372</sup> and therefore realign the Italian intellectual elite to rites and rituals, which they considered would better the fate of the country.<sup>373</sup> My hypothesis is that within the more peripheral Rites, often catalogued under the term of ‘fringe Masonry’ such as the *Rito Filosofico*, initiates who sought a more elitist path that would go beyond the Enlightenment ideals of *liberté*, *égalité*, *fraternité*, could further their agendas in a secret society, abandon the secularised and disenchanted approach to Freemasonry and remain virtually unnoticed by other brothers and the world at large,<sup>374</sup> although it must be noted that within and outside of Italy, even more established Rites, with a large following did possess occult overtones.<sup>375</sup>

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<sup>372</sup> The *Mos Maiorum* was a network of customs, which, in Republican Rome, provided a yardstick to measure social and sometimes legal norms. For a clearer account of these traditions and the virtues attributed to them, see Karl-J. Hölkenskamp, *Reconstructing the Roman Republic: An Ancient Political Culture and Modern Research* (Princeton University Press, 2010), p. 17; E.J. Kenney, *The Age of Augustus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 42; John E. Stambaugh, *The Ancient Roman City* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1988); for a first hand account see Marcus T. Cicero, *De Officiis*, trans. by Walter Miller (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1913), I.34-35.

<sup>373</sup> On the secularization and democratization of Freemasonry at the turn of the twentieth century, see Jan Snoek, ‘Drei Entwicklungsstufen des Meistergrads’, *Quatuor Coronati Jahrbuch für Freimaurerforschung* (2004), pp. 21-46; *idem*, ‘Trois Phases de développement du grade de Maître’, *Acta Macionica* 14 (2004), pp. 9-24; Conti, ‘Massoneria e Sfera Pubblica’, pp. 579-610; finally see Reghini, ‘La Massoneria come Fattore’, pp. [300] 297-310: ‘Contemporary Freemasons have the same sympathy towards the ancient occult sciences as the devil has towards holy water, and, not being able to deny their origin, they are just happy to deny it with facts, considering them as the Order’s original sin’; and Eduardo Frosini, *Massoneria*, p. 4: ‘the faith in the supreme ideals of the Order [...] has been substituted by the opposite policy, rebellious, directed, apparently, towards the noble goal of social emancipation, an avant-garde politic that can, under some circumstances, be a part of the masonic programme, but cannot become the whole programme without losing the *raison d’être* of the World Order’.

<sup>374</sup> The concept of fringe Masonry has created many debates in academic circles: it was first used in an openly emic and disparaging way in Ellic Howe ‘Fringe Masonry in England: 1870-85’, *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum* 85 (1972), pp. 242-80, in order to describe those Rites, which had briefly flourished in England without the approval of the United Grand Lodge of England (est. 1717). As Henrik Bogdan and Jan Snoek have pointed out in ‘Introduction’, *Handbook*, pp. [1] 1-10, the scholarly consensus has decided to drop the terms ‘fringe’ and ‘irregular’ for such lodges, preferring a more neutral definition of the two dominant versions of Freemasonry as ‘regular’, for the pre-existing Grand Lodge, and ‘liberal’, for the other Rites that claimed independence from said pre-existing authority. For the sake of clarity, as linking Reghini’s preference for the ‘liberal’ Rites would clash with his opposite, conservative and elitist view of life, I will be referring throughout the chapter to fringe masonic Rites, rather than using the possibly misleading term ‘liberal’.

<sup>375</sup> Reghini, as will be discussed in this chapter, was initiated in a Rite replete with occult overtones. About it, Francesco Brunelli, in his *Rituali dei gradi simbolici di Memphis e Misraim* (Foggia: Bastogi, 1981), p. 45, would write: ‘the Rite is a visible, tangible nexus between the lower sphere and the higher sphere. It provides the keys to the Arcana, the means in which they may be revealed and practiced’.

In order to do so, the chapter will be divided into three specific sections: in the first one I will consider the role of the different expressions of Freemasonry and their impact on Italian society: a short history of the different masonic Rites shall be necessary, along with a brief description of the so-called fringe masonic bodies, which Reghini seemed to favour because of their greater ties to occult lore and a smaller number of initiates. Subsequently, the relationship between Freemasonry and the Vatican will be scrutinised in detail, in order to provide a corroboration to the reasons behind Armentano's and Reghini's sympathy towards masonic structures: a landmark event on behalf of the Christian Church was the organisation of the *Primo Congresso Internazionale Antimassonico* (*First International Anti-Masonic Congress*) in the Italian city of Trento, which spanned from 20 to 26 June 1896, just six years, as we shall see, before Reghini's first connection with Freemasonry in 1902.<sup>376</sup>

The second main section of this chapter will be devoted to the pivotal moment in Reghini's life: his initiation into a supposed unbroken lineage of sages and priests who had, for more than two thousand years, striven to keep the flame of ancient Roman customs burning. From Reghini's own writings I will be able to argue that Reghini lived up to the demands of this initiation to such an extent, that every single action for the rest of his life would be devoted to the preservation and the study of this singular tradition. Although very scant allusions are made to what, and even who, constituted this school of thought, an analysis of Reghini's reference to the *Schola* in his writings will prove invaluable for the understanding of the grand scheme that a handful of Roman Traditionalist would orchestrate on the backdrop of the rising political turmoil leading to Benito Mussolini's March on Rome of 1922. Eric Hobsbawm's theories on the invention of sacred traditions and Olav Hammer's theory

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<sup>376</sup> See *Atti del Primo Congresso Massonico Internazionale: Trento XXVI-XXX settembre MDCCCXCVI* (Monauni: Unione Antimassonica Universale, 1898); *La Nuova Crociata: Numero Unico*, 1 (1896), pp. 1-18; an anti-masonic hymn was composed for the occasion: Edoardo Carlo Stefecius and Giuseppe Poli, *Inno Antimassonico: Composto in Occasione del I Congresso Antimassonico Internazionale di Trento* (Rome: Unione Antimassonica Universale, 1897); Sergio Benvenuti, 'Il Congresso Antimassonico di Trento del 1896 e le Mistificazioni di Leo Taxil', *Bollettino del Museo del Risorgimento e della Lotta per la Liberta* 37 (1988), pp. 45-61.

on the use of such traditions to bolster an occult group's credibility will necessarily be discussed, as the *Schola Italica* seems to provide a more than fitting example.<sup>377</sup>

Finally, the chapter will deal with Reghini's actual involvement with one specific masonic obedience, the *Rito Filosofico Italiano* and with its colourful, unreliable and troublemaking leader Eduardo (sometimes Edoardo) Frosini (1879-?), and Frosini's stormy relationship with Reghini himself. The short history of the Philosophical Rite and the *Schola's* attempt to permeate this institution with Ancient Roman precepts was the closest Reghini and his associates ever came to actuating a 'Traditionalist revolution', although it was not the last attempt.<sup>378</sup> Frosini's ties with other Freemasons around Europe will also be documented, and a very brief mention of his relationships with the more famous Gerard Éncausse (Papus),<sup>379</sup> John Yarker (1833-1913)<sup>380</sup> and Aleister Crowley (1875-1947),<sup>381</sup> just to give three names, will illustrate the connection of these smaller obediences to many of the major agents within the European occult milieu.

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<sup>377</sup> See Hobsbawm and Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*; Hammer, *Claiming Knowledge*; Robert Borofsky, *Making History. Pukapukan and Anthropological Construction of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Thomas Hauschild, 'Making history in southern Italy', in *Other Histories*, ed. by K. Hastrup pp. 29-44. (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 29-44.

<sup>378</sup> See Chapter 7 for the activities of the Ur Group.

<sup>379</sup> Papus's most popular works are, in my opinion, Gerard Éncausse, *Traité Méthodique de Science Occulte*, 3 Vols. (Paris: Georges Carré, 1888-1891); idem, *La Science des Mages et ses Applications Théoriques et Pratiques* (Paris: Chamuel Editeur, 1892); idem, *Kabbalah: Tradition Secret de l'Occident* (Paris: Georges Carré, 1892). For secondary sources, see Marie-Sophie André and Christophe Beaufiles, *Papus, Biographie: La Belle Époque de l'Occultisme* (Paris: Berg International, 1995).

<sup>380</sup> By John Yarker, see *The Arcane Schools* (Belfast: Carswell and Son, 1909); *The Various Rites and Degrees of Free and Accepted Masonry* (London: J. Hogg, 1872); idem, *Two Lectures on High Grade Masonry* (Liverpool: n.p., 1886); idem, *The Ancient Constitutional Charges of the Guild Free Masons: To Which is Added a Comparison with York Freemasonry* (Belfast: William Tait, 1909); secondary sources include John Hamill, 'John Yarker, Masonic Charlatan?', *Ars Quatuor Coronatum* 109 (1996), pp.191-214; William L. Cummings, 'John Yarker: a Study', *Nocalore: Being the Transactions of the North Carolina Lodge of Research No 666, A.F. & A.M 9* (1939), pp. 76.85; Richard Kaczynski 'John Yarker: Masonic Archaeologist', in idem, *Forgotten Templars: The Untold Origins of Ordo Templi Orientis* (Baltimore, MD: pp., 2012): pp. 163-184.

<sup>381</sup> For Aleister Crowley's major works, see Aleister Crowley, *The Confessions of Aleister Crowley: an Autohagiography* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979); idem, *Magick in Theory and Practice – Book 4 Part III* (Paris: Lecram Press, 1929); idem, *The Book of Thoth* (London: OTO, 1944); the definitive biography on Crowley is Richard Kaczynski, *Perdurabo: The Life of Aleister Crowley*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2010).

A small section will sum up these three subdivisions in order to provide a more synthetic and clearer argumentation in favour of my initial hypothesis.

## **2. THE ROLE OF FREEMASONRY IN MODERN ITALY**

### **2.1. A BRIEF HISTORY OF ITALIAN FREEMASONRY (1861-1914)**

After the foundation of the *Loggia Ausonia* in Turin in 1859, which I referred to in the second chapter, Freemasonry seemed to blossom in Italy.<sup>382</sup> Founded two years later, and promoted by most of the creators of the *Ausonia* Lodge, the G.O.I., or *Grande Oriente Italiano* (Grand Orient of Italy), enabled lodges, which were to rise across the peninsula, to share a common observance, in accordance with international masonic laws.<sup>383</sup> As explained in chapter 2, though, G.O.I. was born in tumultuous times in Italian history: the Reign of Italy had just been proclaimed, while Garibaldi had yet to confront the Kingdom of the Two Sicilys, and General Cadorna would not conquer Rome until 1870: therefore, James Anderson's (1680-1739) *Constitutions* (1723), which were considered a blueprint for all international masonic bodies and forbade lodge-members to engage in political affairs, were largely dismissed by Italian brothers.<sup>384</sup> Politicians with visible public profiles thus never disdained mixing their political activism with their masonic militancy: notable examples include Risorgimento hero Giuseppe la Farina (1815-1853), President of the Italian Chamber of Deputies Michele Coppino (1822-1901), university professor and politician Pier Carlo Boggio (1827-1866) and Foreign Minister Costantino Nigra (1828-1907).<sup>385</sup> When the first twenty-three lodges met in Turin in December 1862, three main aims for Italian Freemasonry were ratified: 'a) Independence and unity of individual nations, and fraternity among the same – nationality being sacred; b) Tolerance of every religion, and equality among beliefs [...]; c) Moral and material progress of all social classes'.<sup>386</sup> It is clear right from the beginning that Reghini would not have

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<sup>382</sup> See especially, Aldo A. Mola, 'Promana da Nord-Ovest la Vera Luce d'Oriente, in idem, *Storia della Massoneria*, pp. 60-80.

<sup>383</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 65-74.

<sup>384</sup> See Conti, 'Massoneria e Sfera', pp. 579-610.

<sup>385</sup> *Ibid.*, 580-581; Mola, *La Massoneria*, pp. 69-70.

<sup>386</sup> *Costituzioni della Massoneria Italiana Discusse e Votate dalla Prima Assemblea Costituente Massonica Italiana nelle Tenute delli 27, 28, 29, 30, 31 Dicembre 1861, Valle di Torino 5861* (Turin: np., 1861), p. 1: 'a) Indipendenza ed unità delle singole nazioni, e

appreciated the ‘fraternity’, the ‘tolerance’ and ‘material progress’ of the masses, so it is not surprising that he would always take the route less beaten, when it came to affiliations to masonic bodies.

After having traced the basic direction in which to steer G.O.I., the major representatives of the *Grand Orient* wrote a statute, which, where membership requirements were concerned, was not particularly strict, and aimed at gaining the biggest number of members in the shortest time possible.<sup>387</sup> Soon, G.O.I. was characterised by Italian traits that were not present in foreign Grand Lodges: the Deist Great Architect of the Universe and its religious tolerance was soon substituted by a well documented presence of lay sentiments, bordering on the anticlerical: a clear legacy of the earlier years of the *Risorgimento*. As scholar Fulvio Conti has written,

Consequently, the cosmopolitan universalism, which had been paraded in the constitutions, slowly gave way to a [form of] patriotism, which, at least at the head of the obedience, never knew decline or second thoughts.<sup>388</sup>

In a speech held in Reggio Calabria in 1885, the Grand Master of G.O.I. Adriano Lemmi (1822-1906) made a clear distinction between internal affairs and nationalism, which had by now come to occupy a prominent place in the minds of Italian Freemasons, and the international solidarity program first proposed in 1861, and which expected masonic bodies to help foreign lodges in times of need:

First of all, we have to provide for ourselves, then outside needs. Other peoples do not think nor act differently. Would we be more Italian than humanitarian this way? I believe not. [...] Regardless I know that the love for family is the first source for love of the fatherland: this given, he who did not love his own fatherland, could he love humanity?<sup>389</sup>

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fraternità delle medesime; b) Tolleranza di qualunque religione , ed uguaglianza assoluta dei culti; c) Progresso morale e materiale delle masse’.

<sup>387</sup> Conti, ‘Massoneria e Sfera Pubblica’, pp. 583-584.

<sup>388</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 586: ‘Di conseguenza, l’universalismo cosmopolita sbandierato nelle costituzioni lasciò progressivamente spazio a un patriottismo che, almeno ai vertici dell’obbedienza, non conobbe flessioni o tentennamenti’.

<sup>389</sup> Quoted in Conti, ‘Massoneria e Sfera Pubblica’, p. 587: ‘Prima dobbiamo provvedere alle cose nostre, poi a quelle di fuori. Gli altri popoli non pensano e non agiscono diversamente.

The differences between masonic movements of the seventeenth and eighteenth-century and fin de siècle Italian Freemasonry were noticeable: the weight had shifted to a definite national-political standpoint, the esoteric and initiatic dimensions cast aside: many members would also attend public events in masonic regalia, diminishing the divide between bourgeois would-be affiliates and the higher strata of the masonic milieu.<sup>390</sup>

A complete unity of all masonic lodges in Italy seemed to be impossible, though, since, in the southern regions of the country, other institutions, which would not bow down to the Turin G.O.I. had already been founded: the most important was definitely the *Supremo Consiglio Grande Oriente d'Italia dell' Antico e Accettato Rito Scozzese* (Supreme Council Grand Orient of Italy of the Antient and Accepted Scottish Rite) based in Palermo, which had been founded in 1860 by a group of Sicilian democrats, who had among its supporters future prime minister Francesco Crispi (1818-1901) and the greatest of *Risorgimento* heroes: Giuseppe Garibaldi (1807-1882).<sup>391</sup> The principal reasons of contrast between the two factions were essentially two: while the Turin group was by all means pro-government and had adopted only the first three degrees of Freemasonry (that of 'Entered Apprentice', 'Fellowcraft' and 'Master Mason'), the Palermo Freemasons were democratic and still followed Mazzini's and Garibaldi's *Risorgimento* ideas. In 1864, though, during a plenary of all Northern G.O.I. lodges in Florence, the democratic wing gained most positions of power, and was thus able to create a dialogue with Palermo: artificer of this coming together of the two competing bodies was the election as Grand Master of Francesco de Luca (1811-1875), a southern democratic mason. It was only in April 1872 that the process of unification of all Italian lodges became a reality, during the plenary session at the *Argentina* theatre in Rome: Giuseppe Mazzoni (1808-1880),

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Saremo forse in tal modo più Italiani che umanitari? Non credo [...]. D'altronde io so che l'amore della famiglia è fonte prima dell'amore alla Patria: ciò posto, chi non amasse la patria, potrebbe amare l'umanità?

<sup>390</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 606-610.

<sup>391</sup> In the same year, another Supreme Council would be created in Naples under the supervision of Domenico Angherà, Italian patriot and founder of the *Loggia Sebezia*. See Gian Mario Cazzaniga, 'Ermetismo ed Egizianesimo a Napoli', in: *Storia d'Italia*, p. 560. See also Luigi Sessa, *I Sovrani Grandi Commendatori e Breve Storia del Supremo Consiglio d'Italia del Rito Scozzese Antico ed Accettato. Palazzo Giustiniani dal 1805 ad Oggi* (Foggia: Bastogi, 2004).



member of the left-wing in the Kingdom of Italy's parliament was elected Grand Master, and out of twenty-one members of G.O.I.'s council, sixteen were freemasons and representatives of parliament.<sup>392</sup> The democratisation of Freemasonry was proceeding at considerable speed: Conti tells us that from documents dating 1874 and regarding one-third of the Italian masons, 'the larger nucleus (23%) was represented by clerks, teachers and pensioners, followed by traders, shopkeepers and merchants, which constituted 17.5% of the sum'.<sup>393</sup> Membership to the official, recognised Freemasonry therefore possessed qualities that could appeal to a large number of the Italian bourgeoisie. Despite its shared consensus amongst most classes of Italian society, it nevertheless maintained its own identity in two major qualities that set it apart from foreign masonic manifestations: its strong anticlerical stance and its irredentist and nationalist thrust.<sup>394</sup> Both these factors, present in the wider political spectrum too, were, as we shall see, to influence Reghini in his socio-political and occultist development.

## 2.2. ANTICLERICALISM WITHIN ITALIAN FREEMASONRY

Many researchers, including scholar of Freemasonry Aldo Mola and author Beatrice Bisogni, have brought attention to the phenomenon of widespread anticlericalism within the G.O.I.:<sup>395</sup> according to Conti,

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<sup>392</sup> For a definitive biography on Mazzoni, see Guglielmo Adilardi, *Memorie di Giuseppe Mazzoni (1808-1880). L'uomo, il Politico, il Massone*, 2 vols. (Pisa: Pacini, 2008-2016).

<sup>393</sup> Fulvio Conti, 'Massoneria e Sfera Pubblica', p. 596: 'il nucleo più consistente (23%) era rappresentato dagli impiegati, dagli insegnanti e dai pensionati, seguito da quello dei commercianti, dei negozianti e degli esercenti, che arrivavano al 17.5%'.

<sup>394</sup> Irredentism (from *irredento* or unredeemed) was a political movement which aimed to reclaim and reoccupy a geographic area subtracted by another state. For its Italian manifestation at the turn of the century, see Giulio Vignoli, *I territori Italo-foni non appartenenti alla Repubblica Italiana* (Milan: Giuffrè, 1995); idem, *Gli Italiani dimenticati. Minoranze italiane in Europa* (Milan: Giuffrè, 2000); Gabriele Zaffiri, *L'Impero che Mussolini sognava per l'Italia* (Pozzuoli: The Boopen, 2008).

<sup>395</sup> See Aldo Mola, 'Sempre più scomunicati', in idem, *Storia della Massoneria*, pp. 81-101; Beatrice Bisogni, *Sette Enigmi di Storia Massonica* (Foggia: Bastogi, 1983); Conti, 'Massoneria e Sfera Pubblica', 594-602; Luigi Pruneti, *La Sinagoga di Satana. Storia dell'antimassoneria, 1725 - 2002* (Bari: Laterza, 2002); idem, *Oh, Setta Scellerata ed Empia. Appunti su Oltre Due Secoli di Pubblicità Antimassonica* (Florence: Il Campanile, 1992).

one of the binding elements of masonic activism in the second half of the nineteenth century was without doubt anticlericalism. The aversion towards the Catholic Church and the role it covered in social and political life - a feeling moreover corresponded by analogous sentiments on the ecclesiastical front - manifested in particularly bitter tones [...].<sup>396</sup>

Among the social battles inspired by Freemasonry were the strenuous defence of laity within education, the political struggle to keep religious formation outside of public schools, and the extension of compulsory education in order to defeat the pressing issue of illiteracy.<sup>397</sup> Clerical reaction was always vehement, the most evident manifestation of it being registered in 1896, when the Vatican organised what it had defined as ‘the last crusade’:<sup>398</sup> the *Primo Congresso Internazionale Antimassonico di Trento*, spanning a full five days from 26 to 30 September.<sup>399</sup> The aim of the congress was to ‘strengthen the lay catholic organisations, since only with a united force [...], the now well-known enemy could have been fought’.<sup>400</sup> Trento was a great choice on behalf of the papacy: an Italian city in Austrian land, where Freemasonry had been banned, the Habsburg rulers had been more than happy to host the event, thus enflaming the hearts of Freemasonry which had been challenged both in their enlightenment-derived beliefs and in their irredentist yearnings. The major papal press organ, the *Osservatore Romano (Roman Observer)*, est. 1861), mocked the masons from its safe geographic position:

Oh welcome be the Anti-masonic Congress, and the new Crusade it undertakes against the guilty sect, may this be the new dawn of that lucky

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<sup>396</sup> Conti, ‘Massoneria e Sfera Pubblica’, p. 597: ‘Uno degli elementi accomunanti dell’attivismo massonico del secondo Ottocento fu senza dubbio l’anticlericalismo. L’avversione per la Chiesa cattolica e per il ruolo che essa svolgeva nella vita sociale e politica – peraltro ricambiata da sentimenti del tutto analoghi sul versante ecclesiastico – ebbe toni di particolare asprezza [...]’.

<sup>397</sup> See *L’istruzione in Italia tra Sette e Ottocento*, ed. by Angelo Bianchi (Brescia: La Scuola, 2007); Angelo Gaudio, ‘Legislazione e Organizzazione della Scuola, Lotta Contro l’Analfabetismo’; Benedetto Vertecchi, *La scuola italiana da Casati a Berlinguer* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2001).

<sup>398</sup> See Antonio Gualano, *Il Congresso Antimassonico Internazionale di Trento: L’Ultima Crociata* (Trapani: pp., 2010), pp. 105-118.

<sup>399</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>400</sup> *Ibid.*, 105-6: ‘potenziare le organizzazioni dei laici cattolici giacché solo con una forza unita [...], si sarebbe potuto combattere il nemico non più segreto’.

day in which, once the enemies of our holy religion have been dispersed from the face of the earth, the sweet reign of Jesus Christ may return upon all men.<sup>401</sup>

Within the five days of the Congress, attacks against the illuministic principles professed by Freemasons, which, notwithstanding the difference in opinion, could still be object of scrutiny, moved to an ‘incredible battle against the worshippers of Lucifer, against the bloodthirsty ones who did not disdain to plot against legitimate power in the dungeons, in which the most unworthy and shameful things for a human being were being plotted’.<sup>402</sup> As Aldo Mola wrote, when commenting upon the saturation of the social climate by the superstition and fantasies of the Church:

Not much more troublesome were the recurring ‘revelations’ of ecclesiastic representatives who, once every so often, ‘discovered’ the true plot and occult pacts devised in view of the imminent universal revolution, destined to swipe away every order, institution, moral foundation: way beyond the esoteric preoccupations of the fin de siècle, discussed with anguish between a sensual hysteria, mystical excitations, stimuli which would exude a makeshift naturalism and religious morbidity (refer to the classic *Là-Bas* by Joril-Karl Huysmans, tasting the exaggerated delight of heresy slithering among Catholics, ‘tempted’ like never before by the ‘Adversary’)...<sup>403</sup>

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<sup>401</sup> Anonymous, ‘Il Congresso Antimassonico’, *Osservatore Romano* August 8 1896, p. 2: ‘Oh! benvenuto sia il Congresso antimassonico, e la nuova Crociata che esso intraprende contro la rea setta, sia l’alba novella di quel giorno fortunato che, dispersi dalla faccia della terra i nemici della nostra santa religione, ritorni su tutti gli uomini il dolce regno di Gesù Cristo’.

<sup>402</sup> Quoted in Gualano, ‘Congresso’, pp. 107-108: ‘inconcepibile battaglia contro gli adoratori di Lucifero, contro i sanguinari che non indugiavano a tramare contro il legittimo potere nelle segrete in cui si ordivano le cose piu’ indegne ed indecorose per il genere umano’.

<sup>403</sup> Mola, *La Massoneria*, p. 280: ‘Non molto più temibili erano le ricorrenti ‘rivelazioni’ di ecclesiastici che di quando in quando ‘scoprivano’ la vera trama e le occulte intese ordite in vista dell’imminente rivoluzione destinata a spazzar via ogni ordine, istituzione, fondamento morale. Ben oltre le inquietudini esoteriche di fine secolo, angosciosamente dibattute tra isteria sensuale, eccitamenti mistici, stimoli esaltanti naturalismo contraffatto e morbosità religiosa (si rivada al classico *Là-Bas* di Joris Karl Huysmans) assaporando la smodata voluttà’ di eresia serpeggiante tra i cattolici, ‘tentati come mai dal fascino dell’Avversario’.

This was but a culmination of a clash, which had known other momentous instances in the past: Pope Leo XII's (1810-1903) bull *Humanum Genus* (1884) had defined Freemasonry 'Satan's synagogue', and ex-masons, merry pranksters and catholic extremists, such as Leo Taxil (1854-1907) and Domenico Margiotta (1858-?), did nothing to ameliorate the lot of Freemasons.<sup>404</sup> When, in 1904, Ettore Ferrari (1845-1929), a Rome-based sculptor and deputy of the Italian parliament, was elected Grand Master, his new cabinet was even more interested in intertwining politics and Freemasonry and this approach accentuated an anticlerical stance even more.<sup>405</sup> This left leaning stance, though, created fractures within the G.O.I., as many Freemasons were of a more moderate leaning, and more interested in following the English model, which preached a detachment from politics and religion. The schism took place in 1908, and two years later, a new obedience, named *Gran Loggia d'Italia* (Grand Lodge of Italy) or *Piazza del Gesu'*, from the name of the Piazza where the headquarters were located in Rome, was created. Head of the schismatic faction, a protestant pastor named Saverio Fera (1850-1915).<sup>406</sup>

### 2.3. NATIONALISM AND IRREDENTISM WITHIN FREEMASONRY

While the concept of nationalism is very clear to the scholar of sociology of religion, the concept of irredentism might be new to the reader: by irredentism, I will refer to

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<sup>404</sup> On the Taxil hoax, see Benvenuti, 'Il Congresso'; also see Robert Rossi, *Léo Taxil (1854-1907). Du Journalisme Anticlérical à la Mystification Transcendante*, (Marseille: Quartiers Nord Éditions, 2015); Marie-France James, *Ésotérisme, Occultisme, Franc-Maçonnerie et Christianisme aux XIXe et XXe Siècles, Explorations Bio-Bibliographiques* (Paris: Lanore, 2008); Fabrice Hervieu, 'Catholiques Contre Francs-Maçons: l'Affaire Léo Taxil', *L'Histoire* 145 (1991), pp. 32-39; on Domenico Margiotta, see idem, *Le Palladisme: Culte de Satan-Lucifer Dans les Triangles Maçonniques* (Grenoble: H. Falque, 1895); idem, *Le Culte de la Nature dans la Franc-Maçonnerie Universelle* (Grenoble: H. Falque 1896).

<sup>405</sup> For Ettore Ferrari, sculptor and mason, see Ettore Passalalpi Ferrari, *Ettore Ferrari: Tra le Muse e la Politica* (Città di Castello: Edimond, 2005); *Il Progetto Liberal-Democratico di Ettore Ferrari: un Percorso tra Politica e Arte*, ed. by Anna Maria Isastia (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1997).

<sup>406</sup> For the *Piazza del Gesu'* reality at the beginning of the twentieth century and Saverio Fera's work, see Michele Moramarco, *Piazza del Gesu'*, *Documenti Rari e Inediti della Tradizione Massonica Italiana* (Reggio Emilia: CE.S.A.S., 1992); Luigi Pruneti, *La Tradizione Massonica Scozzese in Italia: Storia del Supremo Consiglio e della Gran Loggia d'Italia degli A.L.A.M. Obbedienza di Piazza del Gesu' dal 1805 a Oggi* (Rome: EDIMAI, 1994).

the nationalistic kind of political and cultural orientation, aiming to annex back to the motherland territories which are linked to it because of culture, customs and language, but politically belonging to another country. In Italy's case, I refer to the North-Eastern regions of Trentino, Friuli, Istria and Dalmatia.

Reghini, Armentano and the other members of the *Schola Italica* were both nationalists and irredentists, thus justifying a section to analyse the interaction between Freemasonry and semi-clandestine irredentist circles.<sup>407</sup> As far as nationalism is concerned, it is true that in the twentieth century, a sincere hatred for Masonry was rife among the cultural-political circles, which were gearing up towards an armed intervention in World War One: Freemasonry incarnated all that nationalists saw as wrong within the socio-political milieu of the day: '[b]ourgeois reformism, a visceral, lay, humanitarian, internationalist approach, which seemed to stifle any expansionistic aim for the country. A tendency to compromise, which [...] was bringing Italy towards a moral and spiritual degeneration'.<sup>408</sup> As I have written, though, Italian Freemasonry was much more involved in politics than its European counterparts, and as the war neared, it was clear that a sense of patriotism remained very strong among politicians involved with Freemasonry, and, when having to decide in favour of the imperialistic expansion in Tripolitania in 1911 or for an intervention in World War One in 1915, the nationalist ideal always prevailed upon ideas of European internationalist compromise.<sup>409</sup> Nationalism had been one of the rising forces within the Italian intellectual and cultural milieu, with intellectuals such as poets Giosué Carducci and Gabriele d'Annunzio adhering to its cause, and had become a force to be reckoned with from 1910, when Enrico Corradini and Luigi Federzoni (1878-1967) founded the *Associazione Nazionalista Italiana* (Italian Nationalist Association). As we have seen in the previous chapter, Corradini, with Papini and others, had founded the nationalist journal *Il Regno*, which was followed by *L'Idea Nazionale* in 1911. That Reghini and Armentano knew and approved of

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<sup>407</sup> See on the subject, Jeffrey Thyssen, 'Freemasonry and Nationalism', in *Handbook of Freemasonry*, pp. 461-472; Maria Adelaide Frabotta and Guglielmo Salotti, *Propaganda ed Irredentismo nel Primo Novecento* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1990).

<sup>408</sup> Conti, 'Massoneria e Sfera Pubblica', p. 609: 'Il riformismo borghese, un viscerale laicismo, un internazionalismo umanitario che soffocava ogni velleità espansionistica della nazione, una perenne tendenza al compromesso e agli accordi clientelari che imbrigliava le energie vitali e spingeva l'Italia verso una degenerazione morale e spirituale.'

<sup>409</sup> See, for example, Franco Gaeta, *Il Nazionalismo Italiano* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1981).

Corradini's ideas has been argued already, although they differed when it came to the thorny issue of religion: while Corradini despised Christianity for its semitic connotations, just like the Roman Traditionalists, he nevertheless upheld the principles of Catholicism, which he viewed as a Romanised, and thus, in his opinion, sanitised, version of Christianity.<sup>410</sup>

When dealing with irredentism, Freemasonry's ties are much more complicated to synthesise, but may be divided within two main groups, for the sake of clarity: on the one hand there were legally-created associations such as *Lega Nazionale* (National League), *Pro Patria* (For the Fatherland) and the *Circolo Dante Alighieri* (Dante Alighieri Circle), which based its activities on a series of cultural events, that would promote the cause of reannexation of the lost lands through non-violent means and through intellectual debates.<sup>411</sup> The G.O.I., particularly its most moderate wing, was very close to these associations, and for the *Dante Alighieri* in particular we have many examples of interaction between the two entities; on the other hand there were proper secret societies, mostly composed of young people with more republican political views and more revolutionary in nature: the G.O.I. did not officially approve of these formations, although it followed their development closely, and some individual republican mason may have leant his support on an individual basis. The Mazzinian and Garibaldian inspiration of these groups often brought them to put into practise real demonstrative actions, which would often end in violence:

the detonation of explosives and make-shift bombs in front of edifices representing the Austrian State; the distribution of flyers and pamphlets exalting Italy during theatrical representations or visits of official representatives of the Austrian government [...].<sup>412</sup>

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<sup>410</sup> See Rocco D'Alfonso, 'Il Nazionalismo Italiano e le Premesse Ideologico-Politiche del Concordato' in Marco Mugnaini, *Stato, Chiesa e Relazioni Internazionali*, (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2007), p. 69.

<sup>411</sup> See Tullia Catalan, 'Le Società Irredentiste e la Massoneria Italiana', in *Storia d'Italia Anni 21 La Massoneria*, ed. by Gian Mario Cazzaniga (Turin: Einaudi, 2006), pp.611-656.

<sup>412</sup> Catalan, 'Le Società Irredentiste', p. 619: 'lo scoppio di petardi e di bombe rudimentali davanti ad edifici rappresentativi dello Stato Austriaco; la distribuzione di volantini e di opuscoli inneggianti all'Italia durante rappresentazioni teatrali o visite di rappresentanti ufficiali del governo austriaco [...].'

Such demonstrative actions are beautifully represented during the opening scenes of Luchino Visconti's (1906-1966) film *Senso* (1954), where a myriad of glimmering green, white and red leaflets are thrown from the balconies of a theatre to the dismay of the Austrian soldiers sitting below.<sup>413</sup>

No matter how strong the ties between the G.O.I. and the irredentist circles, be they moderate or more active, its role was essentially that of mollifying the most turbulent groups, through the intercession of the more moderate circles, such as the *Dante Alighieri*.<sup>414</sup> Such a stance, as may be imaginable, was not entertained by the Roman Traditionalists, who would resort to irregular, or fringe, Masonry to pursue their goals, thanks to a less visible profile and a greater liberty within said obediences. Reghini especially, as I will document in this chapter and in chapter six, would resort to fringe Masonry because of the less-intrusive presence of universalist ideas, outspoken proselitism among the bourgeoisie and left-leaning political sympathies.

#### 2.4. FRINGE MASONRY IN ITALY

Fringe obediences in Italy would appear to be, to the scholar of Western esotericism, of much greater interest: not only was the esoteric and initiatic aspect not ignored, like in the G.O.I., but it constituted in many cases the fundamental aspect, which provided spiritual nourishment to those, such as Reghini, who had by the late 00s come to see mainstream masonry as completely devoid of any spiritual or intellectual aspect whatsoever. His idea of regular freemasons was clear: in 1906, on the pages of *Leonardo* he had written:

A new coat of green paint is not enough to transform into free-thinkers some marionettes who have always thought with someone else's brain, and to tilt their head left and right is not more intelligent than making it oscillate from top to bottom.<sup>415</sup>

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<sup>413</sup> *Senso*, directed by Luchino Visconti (1954; Italy: Lux Film, 2011), DVD.

<sup>414</sup> Catalan, 'Le Società Segrete', pp. 611-618.

<sup>415</sup> Reghini, 'La Massoneria come Fattore', p. 307: 'Una mano di vernice verde non basta a trasformare in liberi pensatori delle marionette che hanno sempre pensato colla testa altrui, e dimenare la testa da destra a sinistra e viceversa non è più intelligente che farla oscillare dall'alto al basso'.

And from the conclusion of the same article:

The masons of our time prefer to remain rough stone rather than becoming polished stone; and if Plato were alive he would refuse once again to teach these unworthy initiates the secret of the cubic stone. By explaining it, he would expose the hermetic cross, and freemasons would exchange it with the catholic Church's cross [...]<sup>416</sup>

Reghini's frustration is palpable in these passages: the fact that even members of masonic orders did not show an interest in the occult traditions he was pursuing must have outraged him, just as much as the opening of Freemasonry towards a wider, and thus less elitist, membership. The left-wing tendencies of mainstream Freemasonry left him and his companions very little to work with: hence the decision to resort to the smaller Rites of fringe Masonry. What then, could fringe masonry provide Reghini with, that regular obediences could not? Beatrice Bisogni, an Italian masonic researcher, describes the rise of 'irregular' masonic groups, more interested in spirituality than politics, as a moment of global crisis, which, according to her, kickstarts individual spiritual impasses, when man finds it too difficult to find adequate answers in pre-existing systems, be they political, philosophical or religious: 'As always', she writes, 'it happens that some energies may agitate themselves in a convulsive and confused manner, and yet in their apparent and too often accepted irrationality, testify to a rebellious behaviour and a gnoseological will [...]'.<sup>417</sup> Despite the extremely emic approach of the quote, it is my opinion that if Bisogni were right, such an aspiration to a gnoseological dimension must have transcended the often-mundane practices of the official Rites, and this, in my opinion, could be the reason why Armentano and Reghini sought their approach to Freemasonry through the fringes. Bisogni focuses on five distinct rites, which, because of space restraints, I will only list, without delving into their history, fascinating as that might be: the *Antico e*

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<sup>416</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 310: 'I muratori del nostro tempo preferiscono rimanere pietra greggia al divenire pietra polita: e Platone redivivo rifiuterebbe ancora una volta di spiegare a questi indegni iniziati il mistero della pietra cubica. Spiegandola ne uscirebbe una croce ermetica, ed i frammassoni la prenderebbero per la croce della Chiesa cattolica'.

<sup>417</sup> Bisogni, *Sette Enigmi*, p. 84: 'Come sempre accade le energie possono allora agitarsi convulse e confuse ma anche nella loro apparente e troppo spesso accettata irrazionalita', esse testimoniano un atteggiamento di ribellione ed una volonta' gnoseologica[...]'.



*Primitivo Rito Orientale di Memphis-Mizraim* (Antient and Primitive Oriental Rite of Memphis-Misraim), also called Egyptian; the *Antico e Primitivo Rito Orientale Di Memphis* (Antient and Primitive Oriental Rite of Memphis); the *Rito Egiziano Riformato* (Reformed Egyptian Rite); the *Rito di Memphis Riformato* (Reformed Memphis Rite); and the *Rito Filosofico Italiano* (Italian Philosophical Rite).<sup>418</sup> As we shall see, it will be the latter Rite that Armentano and Reghini will choose to infuse with their Roman Traditionalist theories.<sup>419</sup>

### 3. MEETING A.R.A. AND REGHINI'S MASONIC PAST

#### 3.1. ENTER FREEMASONRY: FROM *RIGENERATORI* TO *LUCIFERO*

Arturo Reghini showed a strong interest towards Freemasonry from a very young age: in 1902, in the same year he joined the Theosophical Society, through his friend Giuseppe Sulli-Rao, whom we have discussed at length in the previous chapter, Reghini was admitted to the *I Rigeneratori* (*The Restorers*) lodge of Palermo. The lodge belonged to the Oriental Rite of Memphis, a Rite that Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821) had allegedly been the first European to be initiated in, at the feet of the Great Pyramid in 1798. The first documented lodge of this Rite in Europe had been established by Napoleonic officers, who had come back to France from Egypt: on 30 April 1815, Samuel Honis (nd.), Gabriel Mathieu Marconis de Nègre (1795-1868) and Thomas-Alexander Dumas (1762-1806) founded the mother-lodge *Les Disciples de Memphis* (The Disciples of Memphis).<sup>420</sup> The *I Rigeneratori* lodge was subsequently founded in Palermo by Baron Nicola Giuseppe Spedalieri (1812-1898) in the year 1876. The regeneration which was implied by the name of the lodge referred to the revolt of 12 January 1848, when political activists Rosolino Pilo (1820-1860), Francesco Crispi and Salvatore Spinuzza (1829-1857) had organised the uprisings in Sicily, which had hastened Garibaldi's expedition. Clearly an irregular Rite, it accepted both men and women and added further grades to the usual three, containing esoteric teachings), *I Rigeneratori* was highly valued as an initiatic centre. Among its

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<sup>418</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 84-103.

<sup>419</sup> See Sestito, 'Pitagorismo e Tradizione Romana', in idem, *Storia del Rito*, pp. 69-74.

<sup>420</sup> See Emmanuel Rebold, *Histoire des Trois Grandes Loges de Francs-Maçons* (Paris: Collignon, 1864), p 596; Gastone Ventura, *Les Rites Maçonnique de Misraïm et Memphis* (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1986), pp. 72-89.

most notable members, through its *fin de siècle* activities, we find Abbot Domenico Angherà, founder of the *Sebezia* lodge in Naples; Giuseppe Garibaldi and his second in command Nino Bixio (1821-1873); John Yarker, who covered the position of Great Hierophant and International Head of the Order from November 1902; his successor, from 1913, was Papus. Whether Reghini ever actually travelled to Palermo is still not clear, as his disciple and first biographer Giulio Parise and Eduardo Frosini imply he did, while the *Encyclopédie de la Franc-Maçonnerie* clearly states that Reghini was initiated by Sulli-Rao ‘on the sword’, or by proxy.<sup>421</sup>

The great distance between Florence and Palermo forced Reghini to find another masonic entity that could satisfy his needs for occult studies: in 1903 he joined the *Michele di Lando* lodge in Florence, and in 1904 he was one of the main reorganisers of the lodge along with Eduardo Frosini and the brothers Pietro (nd.) and Giovanni Mori (nd.): the lodge was re-baptised *Lucifero* (Lucifer). The lodge, following the *Rito Simbolico Italiano* (Italian Symbolic Rite), owed its obedience to the G.O.I. and when Ettore Ferrari was elected Grand Master on 15 February 1904, a new statute was issued, which would once again thwart Reghini’s plans for a more spiritual and elitist manifestation of Freemasonry: according to the statute, the aims of the G.O.I. were to be found in a

Democratisation of Masonry, through the cutting of fees, so that intelligences without means may be enabled to join; the reformation of the symbol: To The Glory of the Great Architect of the Universe; a reduction of the formalities [vide: rituals] of the Rite; a greater development of Masonry’s presence in public life, while maintaining its character intact [...].<sup>422</sup>

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<sup>421</sup> Parise, ‘Nota’, p. i-ii; Maurizio Nicosia, ‘Reghini, Arturo’ in *Encyclopédie de la Franc-Maçonnerie*, ed. by E. Saunier (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 2000), quoted in de Luca, *Arturo Reghini*, p. 10.

<sup>422</sup> Quoted in Ferdinando Cordova, *Massoneria e Politica in Italia: 1892-1908* (Bari: Laterza, 1985), pp. 219-220: ‘Democratizzazione della Massoneria, mediante la riduzione dei tributi, acciò possano accedervi le intelligenze sprovviste di mezzi; Riforma del simbolo: “Alla Gloria del Grande Architetto dell’Universo”; Riduzione delle formalità di Rito; Maggiore sviluppo dell’opera della Massoneria nella vita pubblica pur sempre mantenendone il proprio carattere [...].’

The modernist wing of the G.O.I., much to Reghini's chagrin, had gained the majority, and after his re-election on 26 February 1906, Ferrari had added a sentence to the first article of the G.O.I.'s constitution: 'The Italian Community, closely adhering to the principles and goals that the World Order professes and fights for the democratic principle in the social and political order'.<sup>423</sup> Reghini's reactions are crystallised in the above quotes and in the following statement:

Having the monists, the positivists, the socialists taken over the cabalists and the mystics, the clear waters of esotericism have been roiled, and it is difficult to recognise the origin of that mud puddle that is today's Freemasonry.<sup>424</sup>

Deeply disillusioned by what could be gained by early twentieth-century Freemasonry, again, Reghini had to look elsewhere. In 1907, a musician from Calabria was initiated into the *Lucifero* lodge: eight years younger than Reghini, this mysterious composer from southern Italy was about to change the Florentine thinker forever: his name was Amedeo Rocco Armentano.

### 3.2. A MYSTERIOUS GENTLEMAN: AMEDEO ROCCO ARMENTANO

Not much is known about Amedeo Armentano: born in Scalea, near Cosenza, on 6 February 1886, he was raised by his father Giuseppe Armentano, a wealthy landowner, and his mother Maria Alario.<sup>425</sup> In 1905, at the age of nineteen, he moved to Florence to study violin at the prestigious *Reale Istituto Musicale*, and, as noted above, was initiated into Freemasonry in 1907.<sup>426</sup> Just like Reghini, who quickly fell under the spell of a man eight years younger than him, he frequented the literary cafes *Giubbe Rosse* and *Paskowski*, and has been remembered by many literary figures who

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<sup>423</sup> Quoted in de Luca, *Reghini*, p.16: 'La Comunione Italiana, non discostandosi nei principi e nel fine da quanto l'Ordine Mondiale professa e si propone, propugna il principio democratico nell'ordine politico e sociale'.

<sup>424</sup> Reghini, 'La Massoneria come Fattore', p. 300: 'Subentrati ai cabalisti ed ai mistici i materialisti, i monisti, i positivisti, i socialisti le acque limpide dell'esoterismo sono state intorbidate, ed è difficile riconoscere l'origine di questa pozzanghera che è l'odierna Massoneria'.

<sup>425</sup> Giuseppe Armentano, 'Gli Incontri Fatali', in Armentano, *Massime*, pp. 70-102 [70].

<sup>426</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.

met him: author Nicola Lisi, when writing about Reghini and his authority among the frequenters of the literary cafés in Florence, wrote: ‘Only once did Reghini renounce with simplicity in his conviction to his investiture as magus, which, by the way, was congenial to him. It happened every time that a strong and singular character whose name was Armentano came to the café. His early life was ignored by all, by Reghini too, I think. What was known [...] was that he lived in a castle on a hill off the coast of Calabria’.<sup>427</sup> Augusto Hermet (1889-1954), in his memoirs relating to the first decade, wrote about Reghini and Armentano:

Reghini then, according to his metaphysical principal derived from the hermetic-pythagorean-orphic-eleusinian-daoist-zoharian tradition, said: ‘Non cogito, ergo sum’. And the brotherly hierophant, sturdy, with a red leonine head and athletic jaws, the man with the mace with the huge ivory knob, negligent musician and devourer of hams, applauded him saying: ‘Nihil nihil’. In the grottos below his castle on the sea of Calabria the surviving sirens sung.<sup>428</sup>

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<sup>427</sup> Lisi, *Parlata*, p. 114-5: ‘Il Reghini solo in un’occasione rinunciava con semplicità di convinzione alla investitura di maestro che gli era, del resto, congeniale. La deroga di ogni volta che appariva un forte e singolare personaggio il cui nome era Armentano. I suoi precedenti erano da tutti, e credo anche da Reghini, sconosciuti. Si sapeva che [...] abitava in un castello su un promontorio della costa calabrese’.

<sup>428</sup> Hermet, *La Ventura*, p.140: ‘Reghini allora, secondo il suo principio metafisico desunto dalla tradizione ermetico-pitagorica-orfico-eleusina-taoistico-zohariana, disse: “Non cogito, ergo sum”. E il fraterno jerofante Armentano, tarchiato corpo di rossa testa leonina con atletiche mandibole, l’uomo dalla mazza col grosso pomo d’avorio, musicista negligente e divorator di prosciutti, gli plaudì dicendo: “Nihil nihil”. Nelle grotte sotto il suo castello sul mare calabro cantavano le superstiti sirene’.



Amedeo Rocco Armentano © Associazione Culturale Ignis

The castle in question is without a doubt the *Torre Talao* (*Talao* Tower) in Scalea, near Cosenza, a sixteenth-century coastal fortification that the Spanish had built during their reign over the region of Calabria: Armentano had bought it and transformed it into his living quarters, and hosted many of his Pythagorean disciples during the summer months, where all members of the *Schola* would there practice their mysterious rituals and meditations.<sup>429</sup>

It is clear that Armentano had shaken Reghini out of his disappointing early forays into occultism: in a letter written to an anonymous *sorella* (sister), presumably in

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<sup>429</sup> The *Torre Talao* is mentioned more than once in Aleramo, *Amo Dunque Sono*. The epitolar novel contains letters by Sibilla to her lover Giulio Parise, a disciple of Reghini who was at the time spending a magical retreat in Scalea.

1907, Reghini wrote that ‘Amedeo has simply brought me back to life. When Amedeo came to see me, I had already resigned myself to a life without aim, without a goal, without hope’.<sup>430</sup> In the same letter, Reghini insisted that ‘even in my first dreams of occultism, when the only things I desired were a contact with the Brotherhood, I would have never thought to have the daily happiness of an ever-increasing communion with my friend, brother and Master’.<sup>431</sup> What do we know about the relationship between the two with regards to occultism? What can be said of the period between 1907 and 1910, the year in which Reghini was initiated into the *Schola Italica*, of which Armentano appeared to be the visible head? Di Luca, Reghini biographer, synthesises the many changes in Reghini’s outlook on life, politics and occult matters in two broad categories, with which I agree on a general basis: firstly, from the very beginning of the friendship between master and pupil, Reghini became convinced, and remained so until his death, about an uninterrupted Pythagorean Tradition, passed down through the ages from master to disciple since the days in which Pythagoras taught his followers in Kroton. Secondly, the strong conviction that such a Tradition was intimately bound to a form of Freemasonry which predated the Enlightenment, and therefore could be brought back to its pristine state by eliminating all the profane and misinformed changes that had been made since the advent of modern times.<sup>432</sup> Such ideas were also entertained by other thinkers, the most important of whom was the founding figure of Traditionalism, René Guénon: according to Guénon, whom Armentano knew intimately and corresponded with frequently, Dante had been profoundly influenced by Pythagoras in the use of numbers in his works and in his *Ésotérisme de Dante* (1925) claimed that ‘from Pythagoras to Virgil, from Virgil to Dante, the “chain of tradition” had not been broken on Italian soil’.<sup>433</sup> Armentano’s introduction of Guénon to Reghini helped the Florentine mathematician to solve many theoretical problems, which plagued his occult

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<sup>430</sup> Sestito, *Figlio del Sole*, p. 41: ‘Amedeo mi ha semplicemente resuscitato. Quando Amedeo mi è venuto a trovare io mi ero ormai rassegnato a vivere senza scopo, senza meta, senza speranza’.

<sup>431</sup> *Ibid.*, ‘Anche nei miei sogni di occultismo, quando sole cose che io desiderava era il contatto con la Fraternità, mai avrei pensato di avere la quotidiana felicità di una comunione sempre crescente col mio amico, fratello e Maestro’.

<sup>432</sup> See Arturo Reghini, *I Numeri Sacri nella Tradizione Pitagorica e Massonica* (Rome: Ignis, 1947); idem, ‘Le basi spirituali della Massoneria’, in *Paganesimo, Pitagorismo, Massoneria*, pp. 33-43; idem, ‘Sull’Origine del Simbolismo Massonico’, in *Paganesimo, Pitagorismo, Massoneria*, pp. 49-63.

<sup>433</sup> René Guénon, *Ésotérisme*: p. 24: ‘de Pythagore à Virgile et de Virgile à Dante, la “chaîned de la tradition” ne fut sans doute pas rompue sur la terre d’Italie’.

weltanschaaung, and, in my opinion, paved the way for a modern reformulation or invention of an autochthone Italian/Roman Tradition. In a 1914 article titled ‘Del Simbolismo e della Filologia in Rapporto alla Scienza Metafisica’ (‘On Symbolism and Philology in Relation to Metaphysic Science’), Reghini gave his readers the first clues about the *Schola Italica*:

The Italic School never had myths; its symbolism was as pure and abstract as possible, numeric symbolism. Within it very few ceremonies, notwithstanding the Italic origin of this word; a hard spiritual training ground; a mysticism of the senses, integral, empirical and transcendent, a metaphysical and yet social view; and the light serenity of the pure sky of Calabria.<sup>434</sup>

In his introduction to his translation of Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa’s (1486-1535) *De Occulta Philosophia Libri Tres* (1535), Reghini noted that ‘there exists an oral tradition of hidden knowledge, which may not be transmitted through words (perceived and understood in a profane way). There is still a serious tradition in the West, which has nothing to do with the circus noise, the parody and the imitation of the so-called occultism of today’.<sup>435</sup> A pseudonymous author, writing under the pen-name *Rumon*, in commenting Armentano’s *Schola Italica* pointed out the fact that it aimed to teach an integral idea of Man, which belonged to the classical world and which the Renaissance admirably made its own.

The Roman man, like the Pythagorean, cannot fathom a disconnection between the various dimensions in which the human dimension manifests itself, from esotericism to politics, the political being, according to some,

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<sup>434</sup> Reghini, ‘Del Simbolismo e della Filologia in Rapporto alla Scienza Metafisica’, in *Paganesimo, Pitagorismo, Massoneria*, pp. 117-150 [149] ‘La Scuola Italica non ebbe miti; il suo simbolismo fu il più puro ed astratto possibile, il simbolismo numerico. In essa poche cerimonie, nonostante l’origine italica di questa parola; una dura palestra spirituale, un misticismo sensista, integrale, empirico e trascendente, una visione metafisica eppure sociale; e la serenità luminosa del puro cielo calabrese’.

<sup>435</sup> Enrico Cornelio Agrippa, *La Filosofia Occulta o la Magia*, intr. by Arturo Reghini, 3 vols. (Milan: Fidi, 1927): p. 40: ‘Esiste la tradizione “orale” della sapienza occulta che non è possibile trasmettere con le parole (profanamente percepite ed intese); ed esiste tuttora, in Occidente, una tradizione seria, al di fuori della gazzarra carnevalesca delle parodie e delle pretese del così detto occultismo contemporaneo’.

the last degree of expertise in the Pythagorean school. [...] It would not be out of line to claim that the aim of the Pythagorean school was to constitute an élite founded within the Sacred, that is rooted in the direct knowledge of the Sacred.<sup>436</sup>

With a continuous, slow and laborious work of purification of oneself, the group which gathered around Armentano sought to emulate and become the Pythagorean and Roman man, in order to bring esoteric and political glory and excellence back to Italy in general, and Rome, in particular. Because, as Reghini wrote in *Della Simbologia e Filologia*: '[I]anguage or race are not the causes of this metaphysical superiority, it appears to belong to the place, to the land, to the air itself. Rome, Rome *caput mundi*, the eternal city manifests itself, even historically, as one of these magnetic regions of the earth'.<sup>437</sup>

In sum, the *Schola* aimed to create an élite of metaphysically and politically superior men, who could manipulate, through magical practice and political intervention, the fate of Italy, and bring back the country to its former glory. While Armentano had been the person who claimed to have aligned himself to this Tradition, it was up to Reghini to theorise the practical of this Traditionalist revolution.

### 3.3. REGHINI'S INITIATION IN THE *SCHOLA ITALICA*

Before moving onto the brief experience of the *Rito Filosofico Italiano* a brief discussion on Reghini's initiation into the *Schola Italica* seems necessary: three years after meeting at the *Lucifero* lodge, Armentano finally decided to initiate Reghini into his tradition. The date was set on the winter solstice of 1910, the place chosen was the

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<sup>436</sup> Rumon, 'Note sulla Schola Italica di Amedeo R. Armentano', *Pietas* 3:6 (2012), pp. 31-43 [35]: 'L'uomo romano, come il pitagorico, non concepisce stacco netto tra le varie dimensioni in cui si articola la personalità umana, dall'esoterismo alla politica, il politico ponendosi anzi, secondo taluni, come l'ultimo grado della Scuola pitagorica [...]. Non sarebbe azzardato affermare che il fine della Scuola di Pitagora risiedeva nella costituzione di una élite fondata nel Sacro, vale a dire radicata nella conoscenza diretta del Sacro'.

<sup>437</sup> Reghini, 'Del Simbolismo', p.146-7: 'Il linguaggio e la razza non sono le cause della superiorità metafisica; essa appare connaturata al luogo, al suolo, all'aria stessa. Roma, Roma *caput mundi*, la città eterna, si manifesta anche storicamente come una delle regioni magnetiche della terra'.



*Passo del Vestito*, or *Vestito Pass*, a small, rickety path which connected the Western side of the Apuan Alps to their Eastern slopes.<sup>438</sup> Author and local mountaineer Disioniso D. Bertolorenzi has written about the difficulty of reach such a pass, and if one thinks that the two Pythagoreans set out towards the location during a winter night, through thickets, icy slopes and a vast quantity of snow, the trek to the spot must have been in itself an ordeal.<sup>439</sup> In the same article Bertolorenzi points to a more spiritual dimension behind the choice of the pass itself:

The Apuan [Alps] are to be found in the exact spot where the Italian peninsula detaches itself from the continent. A place of change, a threshold and a meeting point for very diverse environmental conditions. This peculiarity made transformed these mounts into a 'bridging' and passage area for many different cultures and peoples with the pre-existing conditions ever being totally cancelled.<sup>440</sup>

During a very emic *excursus* Bertolorenzi, native of the zone, writes that 'the pass, a small grove in a wood, is right on the limit of an abyss', where by abyss we are meant to think of a deep chasm or ravine.<sup>441</sup> Sestito describes this chasm as 'a frightening gorge, an abyss, a leap of hundreds of meters'.<sup>442</sup> What exactly happened on that night is not entirely clear, and probably never will be: according to Sestito, Reghini was dropped into the abyss, in the obscure chasm of the flabbergasted and lost conscience'.<sup>443</sup> The idea that Reghini must have been lowered down into the 'abyss' by use of a rope tied to his body, and left at the mercy of the elements, is not described

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<sup>438</sup> For a purely geographical knowledge of the area, I have resorted to the following texts: Marco Lapi and Florenzo Ramacciotti, *Apuane Segrete* (np.: Il Labirinto, 1995); Frederick Bailey and Enrico Medda, *Alpi Apuane, Guida al Territorio del Parco* (Pisa: Pacini, 1992); Giorgio Giannelli, *Uomini sulle Apuane* (Forte dei Marmi: Galleria Pegaso Editore, 1999): the latter publication is the narration of the explorations of all the famous authors who have visited or written about the Apuan Alps, from Pliny to Dante, to author Ludovico Ariosto.

<sup>439</sup> Quoted in del Ponte, 'L'Iniziazione Pitagorica', pp. 7-16 [8].

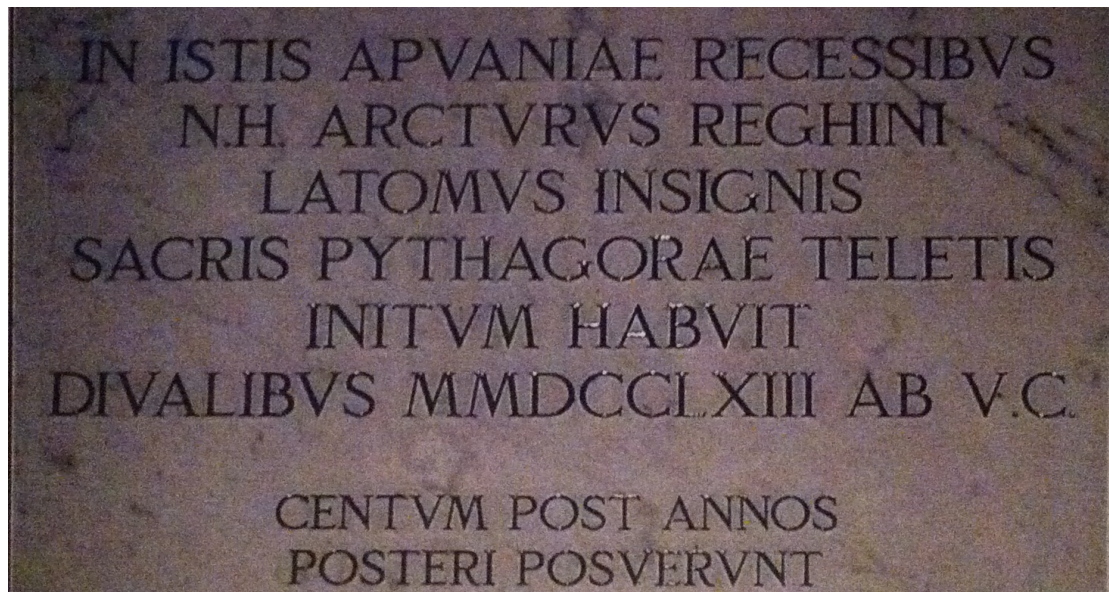
<sup>440</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8: 'Le Apuane [...] si trovano nel luogo esatto in cui la penisola si stacca da continente. Un punto di cambiamento, una soglia ed un luogo di incontro tra condizioni ambientali assai diverse. Questa specificità fece di tali monti un'area di "cerniera" e di trapasso tra culture e popoli senza che venissero mai del tutto cancellate condizioni pregresse'.

<sup>441</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10: 'Il passo, una piccola radura in un boschetto, è proprio sul limite dell'abisso'.

<sup>442</sup> Sestito, *Figlio del Sole*, p. 50: 'uno spaventoso precipizio, un abisso, un salto nel vuoto di centinaia di metri'.

<sup>443</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50: 'nell'oscuro baratro della coscienza esterrefatta e smarrita'.

in detail by the main sources Parise, Sestito or De Luca:<sup>444</sup> author Piero Fenili, in comparing the figure of Giustiniano Lebano and Amedeo Armentano, has written that ‘to the interior abyss [...] of the initiate there can be a correspondent external one, as a *theatrum dramatis*, either a deep subterranean cavity, or an Alpine ravine, if we agree that such physical external environments have only the aim to stimulate an experience that consumes itself uniquely *sub specie interioritatis*’.<sup>445</sup>



Memorial Plaque celebrating the 100 years since Reghini’s Initiation ©CG.

Despite not knowing what exactly happened on the night of the winter solstice, it is clear that the initiation into the Schola Italica marked a fundamental change in Reghini’s outlook on his own spiritual progress and on life in general. In Henrik Bogdan’s *From Darkness to Light* (2003), the author describes the idea of initiation in great detail: in the second chapter, he quotes scholar of religions Mircea Eliade (1907-1986) at length, especially when dealing with different kinds of initiatory processes.<sup>446</sup>

<sup>444</sup> Parise omits the whole episode in his short description of Reghini’s life; Sestito devotes one page to the description of the place and Armentano’s supposed intent, while de Luca, following Parise’s example, chooses to ignore this fundamental step in Reghini’s life.

<sup>445</sup> Quoted in Del Ponte, ‘L’Iniziazione Pitagorica’, p. 12: ‘a questo abisso interiore può corrispondere all’esterno, quale *theatrum dramatis*, sia una profonda cavità sotterranea, sia una voragine alpestre, fermo restando che tali esoterici ambienti fisici hanno soltanto lo scopo di propiziare un’esperienza che si consuma unicamente *sub specie interioritatis*’.

<sup>446</sup> Henrik Bogdan, *From Darkness to Light, Western Esoteric Rituals of Initiation* (Göteborg: Göteborgs Universitet, 2003), pp. 48-50.

In it Bogdan summarises Eliade's threefold division of initiatory experiences: *the rite de passages*, which are usually tied to the growth and aging of an initiate; the initiation within a secret society; the heroic and shamanic initiations, where an ecstatic state is reached by the initiate.<sup>447</sup> It is my hypothesis that, apart from the first kind of initiation (Reghini, at the age of 32 seems to have gone through all traditional rites of passage from childhood to adolescence and then to adulthood), Reghini experienced the other two types of initiation: he was at once ushered within the *Schola Italica* as a full and supposedly high ranking member and he seemed to have experienced some kind of revelatory or ecstatic experience, which changed his outlook on many different aspects of life: the first case is easy to explain. Reghini was ushered into a new life within a secret society, which had as its main goals 'the reconduction of Freemasonry to its initiatic function, pruning away its polluting elements; to orientate society towards an order based on spiritual values'.<sup>448</sup> The second kind of initiation is harder to demonstrate and, in order to describe the change that took place within Reghini, a closer investigation of his correspondence is necessary. In a letter dated 1911 and quoted in Sestito's biography, Reghini writes to his master: 'I feel that I could maybe take interest and sink into one of my old stupid small passions again, but I also feel that no matter how much I sank I could never drown the perception which is budding in me of a new life, serene and lacking the base pleasures and pains of that I that refuses to give up'.<sup>449</sup> And again, referring also to the first kind of initiation granted to him: 'I need occultism like a plant needs water. [...] What would I do with my life, if I did not have before me the sublime task that you have shown me, that you have comforted me again to see and admire with wonder?'<sup>450</sup>

Reghini's introduction into the mysterious *Schola Italica* represented a culmination of his search for an autochthonic form of wisdom, which he could learn

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<sup>447</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 49-50.

<sup>448</sup> Parise, 'Nota', p. vi-vii: 'ricondurre la massoneria alla sua funzione iniziatica, sfrondandola dagli elementi deteriori; orientare la societa' verso un ordinamento basato su valori spirituali'.

<sup>449</sup> Sestito, *Figlio del Sole*, p.51: 'Sento che potrei forse lasciarmi prendere e sprofondare in qualcheduna delle mie antiche stupide passioncelle, ma anche sento che per quanto sprofondassi, non potrei mai annegare la percezione incipiente in me di una vita nuova serena ed esente dai meschini piaceri e dolori di quell'io che non vuole arrendersi'.

<sup>450</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51: 'Io ho bisogno di occultismo come la pianta dell'acqua [...]. Che farei io mai della mia vita, se non avessi davanti a me il compito sublime che mi hai additato, che tu mi hai riconfortato a vedere ed a mirare?'

and transmit, and which seemed to go hand in hand with his elitist view of society, his accentuated nationalism and the need he felt to reform Italian society by harnessing an ancient Italic Tradition.

### 3.4. INVENTED TRADITIONS AS AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL STRATEGY

In the previously mentioned work by religious scholar Olav Hammer, *Claiming Knowledge: Strategies of Epistemology from Theosophy to the New Age*, the fourth chapter is entirely devoted to the ‘Appeal to Tradition’:<sup>451</sup> in it, starting from Hobsbawm’s theories of the creation of Traditions, Hammer delves deeply into the theory, at the same time offering the to reader some practical examples that may make his theories clearer: it is my opinion that the *Schola Italica* could be subjected to the same analysis as the one employed by Hammer with Theosophy and other movements. In order for the esoteric school of the *Schola Italica* to be successful, Armentano, even before Reghini’s enrollment would have had to create an ever-continuing chain, which would create a solid emic history that could bolster his claims. As Hammer writes, ‘For spokespersons [in this case Armentano, and later Reghini][...] in a modern, post-Enlightenment context, critical and well-documented historical accounts will be readily available. Different movements vary in their wish or ability to counter the claims of historical critical research’.<sup>452</sup> Both Armentano and Reghini went to great lengths not to counter, but to offer a novel interpretation of historical events, which, seen through the rosy lenses of Roman Traditionalism, would show patterns that would validate their claims: some examples can be readily found in Reghini: in his first extant article, ‘Giordano Bruno Smentisce Rastignac’, for example, Reghini writes an article in order to refute Rastignac’s (pseudonym of Vincenzo Morello, 1860-1933) ideas that he had enunciated during a conference on the figure of Giordano Bruno: there, Morello had presented Bruno as a precursor of the positivist thought and determinism.<sup>453</sup> Reghini writes,

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<sup>451</sup> Hammer, ‘The Appeal to Tradition’, in *Claiming Knowledge*, pp. 68-157.

<sup>452</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 68-9.

<sup>453</sup> Reghini, ‘Giordano Bruno’, pp. 53-4.

He wasn't a precursor of determinism but a mystic and an occultist. Some of the essentially mystical works are the *Eroici Furori*, the *Sigillus Sigillorum*, and the book of *thirty sigils*, not to mention others; he also believed that 'the reign of God is within us, and that divinity dwells in us because of a reformed intellect and will' [...]. The *De Monade*, and *Cabala* were nothing but tractates on cabalistic and pythagorean philosophy; and he consecrated to magic three whole works and many excerpts of other works'.<sup>454</sup>

In articles regarding Freemasonry, Reghini insists on this institution deriving from the ancient Roman builders and claims that 'it is an undeniable fact that the rosicrucian rituals redacted by Elias Ashmole [...] are based on the egyptian mysteries such as Iamblichus has handed them down to us [...].<sup>455</sup> Every aspect of occultism, and especially Freemasonry, are drawn together to create a 'new' Tradition that harkened back more than two thousand years. In quoting Richard Hofstadter, Hammer evidences this point in the clearest of manners, writing that, in an effort to bolster a preexisting frame of understanding with a historical background, isolated and almost unrelated events and elements are juxtaposed and combined into a new edifice'.<sup>456</sup> Even the founder of the so-called Roman Tradition is moved closer to Rome than he had previously been located: Pythagoras, according to Armentano's 129<sup>th</sup> Maxim, published in his *Massime di Scienza Iniziatica*, was 'Tuscan [ie. Etruscan] and not from Samos, a disciple of Numa and not viceversa',<sup>457</sup> with Reghini echoing these sentiments in an article printed in *Atanòr*.<sup>458</sup>

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<sup>454</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53-4: Reghini, 'Giordano Bruno', p. 53: 'Né fu precursore del determinismo ma un mistico ed un occultista. Opere essenzialmente mistiche sono gli *Eroici Furori*, il *Sigillus Sigillorum*, e il libro dei *trenta sigilli* per non citare altro; sì che egli credette il regno di Dio essere in noi, e la divinitade abitare in noi per forza del riformato intelletto [...]. Il *De Monade*, e la *Cabala* non sono altro che trattati di filosofia cabalistica e pitagorica; alla magia consacro' tre opere intiere piu' numerosi brani di altre opere'.

<sup>455</sup> Reghini, 'La Massoneria', p. 299: 'ed è un fatto innegabile che i rituali compilati dal Rosacroce Eliah Ashmole nel 1648 [...] sono basati sopra i misteri egiziani come Jamblico ce li ha tramandati [...].

<sup>456</sup> Hammer, 'Appeal to Tradition', p. 72.

<sup>457</sup> Armentano, *Massime*, p. 153: 'Toscano e non di Samo, discepolo di Numa e non viceversa'.

<sup>458</sup> Reghini, 'L'Impronta Pitagorica nella Massoneria', *Atanòr* 1-2 (1924), pp. 31-46. See also Gennaro d'Uva, 'La Tradizione Italica', *Politica Romana* 5 (1998/9), pp. 106-125.

Hobsbawm, in his introduction to *The Invention of Tradition*, explained his idea of invented traditions, writing that ‘[i]nvented tradition is taken to mean a set of practices [...], which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior, which automatically implies continuity with the past’.<sup>459</sup> Such a definition fits well with Armentano and Reghini, who never seem to use malice in the construction of their Tradition, but genuinely ‘attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic path’.<sup>460</sup> The elitist approach of the *Schola* is also covered by Hobsbawm, and echoes of his statement may be found in Armentano’s *Massime* and Reghini’s ‘Imperialismo Pagano’:

More commonly they [invented traditions] may foster the corporate sense of superiority of elites- particularly when these had been recruited from those who did not already possess it by birth or ascription- rather than by inculcating a sense of obedience in inferiors. This might be done by assimilating elites to pre-buregeois ruling group or authorities, whether in the militaristic/bureaucratic form [...] or the non militarised ‘moralized gentry’.<sup>461</sup>

Armentano peppered his *Massime* with cold, crystal-clear sentences, which left no room for imagination as to his political views: ‘58 - Men are equal before God and aren’t among themselves [...]. 170 - Democracy is a word without real meaning; it’s an ironic idea of government. 171 - People and Government are two antithetical terms. [...] 221 – In order for them to be true, things needn’t be known by commoners’.<sup>462</sup> In more elaborate and ornate sentences, Reghini often makes sure that his elitist message may come out clearly: a prime example of this is his ‘Imperialismo Pagano’, which will be analysed in depth in the next chapter.

#### **4. ENTER FROSINI: A SINGULAR ALLY**

##### **4.1. THE RITO FILOSOFICO ITALIANO**

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<sup>459</sup> Hobsbawm and Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*, p. 1.

<sup>460</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>461</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>462</sup> Armentano, *Massime*, pp. 148-156: ‘58 – Gli uomini sono uguali innanzi a Dio e non lo sono fra loro. 170 – La democrazia e’ una parola che non ha significato reale; e’ un’idea ironica di governo. 171 – Popolo e governo sono due elementi antitetici 221- Le cose per essere vere non hanno bisogno di essere conosciute dal volgo’.

Throughout the mid-1900s and the 1910s, a singular character acquired prominence in the Italian masonic milieu: Eduardo Frosini, also known by his *nom de plume* ‘Dr. Hermes’, was a travelling salesman, whose business card instead introduced him as Dott. Eduardo Frosini, *Professore di Scienze Sociali ed Antropologiche* (Professor of Social and Anthropologic Sciences).<sup>463</sup> His passion, within the world of Freemasonry, had been the most occult-leaning Rites, which would include the teachings of the great French occultists such as Eliphas Lévi, Josephin Péladan (1859-1918), Stanislas the Guaïta (1861-1897) and, of course, the seemingly omnipresent Papus.<sup>464</sup> Usually pitted against the Eastern lore promoted by the Theosophical Society, such Rites usually were in favour of a restoration of a supposed lost Western Tradition: di Luca, biographer of Reghini and expert in Italian Freemasonry lists some of them:

The *Societas Rosacruciana in Anglia*, the Order of the Golden Dawn in Outer [sic.], the Rite of Memphis and Mizraim, the National Iberian Rite, the Swedenborgian Rite, the *Ordo Templi Orientis*, etc. Usually there were only a handful of followers of these monickers, amongst whom ‘grades’, grand-sounding titles and similar dignities were shared, handed out with the same ease to *ad honorem* members and foreign representatives [...].<sup>465</sup>

In January 1908, Frosini, who had been all but disenchanted by the Italian G.O.I., was nominated *Gran Rappresentante* (Grand Representative) of the *Grande Loggia Simbolica di Spagna* (Grand Symbolic Lodge of Spain) in Italy, with the authority to create his own lodge granted by the head of the Grand Symbolic Lodge of Spain Villarino del Villar (nd.).<sup>466</sup> His other charters included that of the Antient and Primitive Order of Memphis Mizraim by decree of John Yarker, the post as secretary of the newly-created *Federazione Massonica Universale* (Universal Masonic

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<sup>463</sup> See di Luca, *Reghini*, p. 46n.

<sup>464</sup> For a brief yet complete analysis of the French Occult Revival see Christopher McIntosh, *Eliphas Lévi and the French Occult Revival*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2011 [1972]).

<sup>465</sup> di Luca, *Reghini*: ‘la *Societas Rosacruciana in Anglia*, l’*Order of the Golden Dawn in Outer*, il Rito di Memphis e Mizraim, il Rito Nazionale Iberico, il Rito di Swedemborg, l’*Ordo Templi Orientis* etc. Alle sigle in questione, in realtà, facevano capo per solito scarsi seguaci, tra i quali erano generosamente ripartiti “gradi”, titoli roboanti e correlate dignità, elargiti con pari larghezza a soci *ad honorem* ed a rappresentanti all’estero [...]’.

<sup>466</sup> Sestito, *Storia del Rito*, p. 43.

Federation), and, during the second part of the year he founded his own lodge of the Rite of Memphis and Misraim, with claims to autonomy in the day-to-day running of the lodge:

So robustly bolstered by ‘patents’, even if they came from ‘irregular’ expressions of Freemasonry, in March 1909 in Florence he proceeded to found with some followers a *loggia centrale Ausonia* (central Ausonia lodge) and a *Supremo Gran Consiglio Generale dell’Ordine Antico e Primitivo di Memphis e Mizraim* [Supreme Grand Council General of the Antient and Primitive Rite of Memphis and Mizraim], under the denomination of *Rito Filosofico Italiano*.<sup>467</sup>

To better promote his newly-founded body, Frosini published a voluminous book entitled *Massoneria Italiana e Tradizione Iniziatica* (Italian Freemasonry and Initiatic Tradition, 1911).<sup>468</sup> In it Frosini’s theories seemed to have caught the attention of Reghini and Armentano, who had met Frosini back in the days of the *Michele di Lando* lodge.<sup>469</sup> Frosini’s theories, in a style which is scarcely enjoyable and that seem to not have undergone any editing,<sup>470</sup> are, in my opinion, to be summed in these major points. Firstly, the idea that Mazzini’s philosophical and religious theories had great points in common with ‘the esoteric theories handed down to us by ancient initiatory orders [...]. The integration of the Italian School with the Symbolic tradition would have happened already if the philosophical background had been there’;<sup>471</sup> secondly, the primacy of Italy, who according to Mazzini, ‘has within the school of Giordano Bruno, Telesio, Campanella, the *seeds* of a brotherhood between Philosophy and Religion, from which the institutions that can make our Fatherland great again will

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<sup>467</sup> de Luca, *Reghini*, p. 45: ‘Così robustamente munito di “patenti”, ancorché provenienti da massonerie “irregolari”, nel marzo del 1909 a Firenze con alcuni seguaci alla fondazione di una “loggia centrale Ausonia” e di un “Supremo Gran Consiglio Generale dell’Ordine Antico e Primitivo di Memphis e Misraim”, sotto la denominazione di *Rito Filosofico Italiano*’.

<sup>468</sup> Frosini, *Massoneria Italiana*.

<sup>469</sup> See Sestito, *Figlio del Sole*, p. 25-28; di Luca, *Reghini*, pp. 7-27.

<sup>470</sup> A slip in the first edition of the book warned the reader that the author had felt no need to provide an *errata corrige*.

<sup>471</sup> Frosini, *Tradizione*, p. 15: ‘teorie esoteriche tramandateci dalle antiche società iniziatiche [...]. La integrazione con la Scuola Italiana con la tradizione Simbolica sarebbe dunque già fatto compiuto se vi fosse stata la preparazione filosofica’.



descend'.<sup>472</sup> Thirdly, the Roman character of Freemasonry, clear heritage of the Risorgimento: 'Papus is a mystical-esoteric christian and supports synarchy. We of the *Italian School*, Pythagorean and followers of Mazzini, are cosmic-humanist theosophers and to synarchy we oppose isocracy'.<sup>473</sup> Such statements clearly caught the attention of Reghini and Armentano, who had wanted to propagate their theories to a small number of initiates: the Roman character of the *Rito Filosofico Italiano* made it the best option for the two Roman Traditionalists, who had become disillusioned with the workings at the *loggia Lucifero* and wanted to start working towards the awakening of the masses on behalf of an elite with matters concerning Roman Tradition, both in its theoretical and in its practical-operative aspects.

#### 4.2 CHANGES WITHIN THE *R.F.I.* AND THE *RITO'S* SHORT LIFE

The contacts regarding a possible entrance of Reghini and Armentano in the *Rito Filosofico Italiano* began in early 1912:<sup>474</sup> with all his patents and high titles, Frosini still thought that he needed something, or someone, more, in order to be taken seriously in the masonic world. Hence, in the spring of 1912, Frosini and his treasurer Guido Bolaffi (nd.) tried to recruit Reghini, and through him, Armentano.<sup>475</sup> In a letter dated 1 May 1912, Reghini informed his master: 'Frosini is offering me a place in the Supreme Council of the Philosophical Rite with full autonomy in the work', and, in another letter dated 4 May, Reghini expressed optimism at what could be done by the Roman Traditionalists in the *Rito Filosofico*: 'in any case the Philosophical Rite and all things related to it is in our hands, since Bolaffi is responsible, and he is ours [sympathiser or member of the *Schola*] already'.<sup>476</sup> The two Traditionalists decided to enter, Armentano under the pseudonym Hermes of Cosenza (*Ermete Cosentino*), and

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<sup>472</sup> Frosini, *Tradizione*, p. 76: 'ha nella propria scuola di Giordano Bruno, Telesio, Campanella, i germi di un affratellamento tra Filosofia e Religione, dal quale scenderanno le istituzioni che solo possono rifare grande la Patria'.

<sup>473</sup> Frosini, *Tradizione*, p. 158: 'Papus è cristiano mistico-esoterico ed è sinarchista. Noi della *Scuola Italica*, pitagorici e mazziniani, siamo teosofi cosmico-umanisti ed alla sinarchia contrapponiamo l'isocrazia'.

<sup>474</sup> Sestito, *Storia del Rito*, pp. 53-59.

<sup>475</sup> Sestito, *Figlio del Sole*, p. 61.

<sup>476</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 62-3: 'Frosini mi offre un posto nel Supremo Consiglio del Rito Filosofico con piena libertà di lavoro', and 'In ogni caso il Rito Filosofico e annessi à in mano nostra, perché chi fa tutto è Bolaffi, e Bolaffi è nostro'.

by the summer of the same year, the two had opened the *Quirico Filopanti* lodge in Bologna, which, ‘alongside the “Hermes” [lodge] in Florence, the “*I Pitagorici*” [“The Pythagoreans”] in Milan and the *Sebezia* of Naples, [was] among the most dynamic and attended [lodges]’.<sup>477</sup> On the 21 April 1913, to celebrate the anniversary of the foundation of Rome, the Hermes lodge was ‘consecrated’, and *Ermete Cosentino* delivered a speech, which clearly defined the programmatic ideas of the *Rito Filosofico*: ‘Rome has always risen like the *Phoenix* and [...] Italy always woke up, fought in masonic manner and won through the garibaldine saga and the apostolate of Mazzini’.<sup>478</sup> In a crescendo of Roman exaltation, Armentano continued:

And it is for this living and immanent tradition if Italy, guided by the principles, which we, of the Italian Philosophic Rite support and defend, will rise to that greatness and that moral domination of the World that Eternal Rome and all of the glorious italic thought point to, aspire to, desire and will have!<sup>479</sup>

The expansion of the *Rito* was noticeable, and after John Yarker’s death in 1913, lodges as distant as New York, Chicago and Alexandria of Egypt asked Frosini to be able to stand under the tutelage of the *Rito Filosofico*: with the new year, Frosini left his job, in order to fully concentrate his efforts towards his masonic endeavors.<sup>480</sup> His first major aim was to publish a journal, which would have been named *Pitagora* (*Pythagoras*), but the chronic lack of funds made it so the journal never saw the light of the day. By the end of the year, two incidents forced Reghini and Armentano to hastily leave the *Rito* and distance themselves from Frosini and Bolaffi: on the one hand, Frosini, in an article on a literary journal, declared he had been initiated into the *Schola Italica* and could speak on its behalf,<sup>481</sup> on the other hand, the treasurer Bolaffi was found guilty of embezzlement, a strong blow against the credibility of the whole

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<sup>477</sup> Sestito, *Storia del Rito*, p. 121: ‘insieme alla “Hermes” di Firenze, “I Pitagorici” a Milano e la “Sebezia” di Napoli [fu] tra le piu’ dinamiche e frequentate’.

<sup>478</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 138: ‘Roma sempre risorse tra le ceneri come la *Phenice* e che l’Italia si riscosse, lottò massonicamente e vinse attraverso l’epopea garibaldina e l’apostolato Mazziniano’.

<sup>479</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 139: ‘Ed è per questa tradizione vivente ed immanente che l’Italia guidata dai principi che noi, del Rito Filosofico Italiano, sosteniamo e difendiamo, assurgerà a quella grandezza e a quel dominio morale del Mondo che Roma Eterna e tutto il glorioso pensiero italice additano, preconizzano, vogliono ed avranno!’

<sup>480</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 147-149.

<sup>481</sup> Sestito, *Figlio del Sole*, p. 71-73.

*Rito*.<sup>482</sup> While Bolaffi's expulsion from the *Rito* was swift, Reghini could not leave Frosini's claims unchecked, and in an issue of the Theosophical journal *Ultra* Reghini was allowed to retort claiming that: 'our work, purely metaphysical and thus naturally esoteric, has always been voluntarily secret. We did not need to make the existence of this School public; and if Frosini, hadn't by chance, made a step that could cause equivocations, we would have stayed in our shadows'.<sup>483</sup> Reghini resigned from the *Rito* at the end of 1914 and a masonic decree barred him and Bolaffi from ever communicating to their ex-brothers again: 'The civil death (masonic burning) has been inflicted upon the lawyer Guido Bolaffi and Dr. Arturo Reghini for HIGH TREASON. Since the 14 January 1914 [Frosini must have meant 1915], these two gentlemen HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH OUR FAMILY'.<sup>484</sup>

Reghini's expulsion did not seem to affect the Florentine Traditionalist, as already in January 1914 he had set out to work to write a series of important articles to be published on the short lived journal *Salamandra*. It is obvious in my opinion, though, that beyond the surface, a great chance to propagate the tenets of Roman Traditionalism through the vehicle of Freemasonry had been a great chance for the *Schola* to carefully hand pick its choice adherents. While Reghini, in a letter dated 24 November 1913, described Frosini as having 'no esoteric, nor exoteric value' and lacking any knowledge in science, philosophy, classical culture, Armentano was more reluctant to leave the Rite he had been put in charge of, and, at the end of his lifetime, in an interview in Brasil, conducted by Nino Daniele, had admitted:

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<sup>482</sup> de Luca, *Reghini*, p. 50; Sestito, *Figlio del Sole*, p. 70-1.

<sup>483</sup> Reghini, 'La Tradizione Italica', p. 68: 'Il nostro lavoro, puramente metafisico e quindi naturalmente esoterico, è sempre stato volontariamente segreto. A noi non occorre rendere pubblica ragione l'esistenza di questa Scuola; e se il Frosini, non avesse poniamo per inavvertenza, fatto un passo che può ingenerare equivoci, saremmo rimasti bella nostra penombra'.

<sup>484</sup> Sestito, *Storia del Rito*, p. 156: 'La morte civile (bruciamento massonico) è stata inflitta all'avv. Guido Bolaffi di Firenze e al dott. Arturo Reghini per ALTO TRADIMENTO. Fin dal 14 gennaio 1914 e.v., questi due signori NON HANNO PIU' NULLA DI COMUNE CON LA NOSTRA FAMIGLIA'.

Yes, that was our trumpet call, by that I mean that the Italian Philosophical Rite (which, more than a Rite, was a real school, masonic, but up to a certain measure) for a serious pagan imperialism.<sup>485</sup>

## 5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Reghini's forays in the world of Freemasonry cannot be said to have been fruitful: his idea of an elite of highly trained individuals operating behind the scenes in order to awaken the masses and lead them towards a new Pagan renaissance was to prove futile. The anti-clerical sentiments were there, as was the rampant nationalism and the adherence to the irredentist cause: what was lacking was an occult and Traditional think tank to co-ordinate all of these different strands. Already in his *Leonardo* days he had expressed his dissatisfaction with eminent freemasons such as Mazzini and Albert Pike (1809-1891) for their inability to create a Freemasonry within the Freemasonry, a secret elite group, which could coordinate all the quarelling factions.<sup>486</sup> The initial membership within the Philosophical Rite must have given him and Armentano great enthusiasm, but ultimately had mostly damaged their reputation because of their links to characters such as Frosini and Bolaffi. The exchange of patents all across Europe, which so intrigued Frosini, seemed not to impress the members of the *Schola*, who had in mind a deeper and more meaningful idea of masonic work. The highlight of this period was, for Reghini, his meeting with Armentano and his subsequent initiation into the *Schola Italica*. While it is true that not much is known about the activities or the number of members of this occult order, by the analysis of passages in Reghini's correspondence and articles on the subject, it is clear that his entrance into the Italic school revitalised Reghini, pushing him even more towards his goals of a new Roman renaissance. His writings of the pre-war period, be they articles on more esoteric matters or his more political 'Imperialismo Pagano', show the reader a conviction and an enthusiasm in the author's words that was not there during his Theosophical period. Whatever may be said about Armentano's Tradition, invented or not, it clearly made

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<sup>485</sup> *Ibid.*, 120: p. 'Sì, fu quello il nostro squillo di battaglia – vale a dire del Rito Filosofico Italiano (che piu' che un Rito fu una Scuola vera e propria, massonico ma fino a un certo punto) per un imperialismo pagano sul serio'.

<sup>486</sup> Reghini, 'La Massoneria come Fattore', p. 297.

sense to Reghini, who, from 1910 onwards, appeared to sincerely believe to be the last rung on a chain of initiates dating back to Pythagoras and King Numa: and even when Armentano would leave Italy for Brasil, as we shall see, the sense of a sacred mission to conduct to success was still evidently present in Reghini, and he carried on the path shown to him by his Tradition until the very end. Even during the political turmoil of the Great War and Mussolini's rise to power, as we shall see, everything Reghini did was always within the vision provided to him by Armentano and his brand of Roman Traditionalism, brilliantly summarised by Reghini in his article 'Imperialismo Pagano', the analysis of which will comprise the following chapter.

## CHAPTER 5:

### THE GREAT WAR AND *HEATHEN IMPERIALISM* (1915-1920): A CLASH BETWEEN THE MODERN AND THE TRADITIONAL

‘Rightly did Dante say that [...] the world  
was destroyed by Constantine’  
Julius Evola<sup>487</sup>

#### 1. SCOPE OF THE CHAPTER

As the central section in this thesis, most of the chapter will be devoted to a textual analysis of Reghini’s most popular article: ‘Imperialismo Pagano’ (‘Heathen Imperialism’, 1914).<sup>488</sup> A political treatise, a meta-historical reconstruction of the preceding manifestations of the *Schola* and a veritable call to arms for the impending war under the eagle-headed standards of Reghini’s Pagan and imperialist coterie, *Imperialismo* stands out for its simple style and brevity delivering a complete explanation of the core beliefs, the aims and dreams of those who had rallied around Armentano and Reghini. In the year of its publication, Reghini was at the height of his fame within the occult and traditional milieu, and even a publication of one of his articles on a relatively obscure journal, such as *Salamandra*, which did not live long

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<sup>487</sup> Julius Evola, *Imperialismo Pagano: Il Fascismo dinnanzi al Pericolo Euro-Cristiano* (Rome: Mediterranee, 2004 [1928]), p. 310: ‘Ben a ragione Dante diceva che [...] il mondo fu distrutto da Costantino’.

<sup>488</sup> Reghini, ‘Imperialismo Pagano’, The choice of the name ‘Heathen Imperialism’ in the translation of the title, as opposed to a more literal ‘Pagan Imperialism’ stems from the translation of Evola’s own work titled *Imperialismo* with the words *Heathen Imperialism* in the English language: see Julius Evola, *Heathen Imperialism* (Kemper: Thompkins and Cariou, 2007). As I shall argue in chapter 7, the accusations of plagiarism that Reghini moved against Evola are well-founded, and thus, giving the same title to Reghini’s article, translated for the first time in the English language, seems to me to be the best way of rendering the word ‘Pagano’.

enough to see its third issue published, attracted the attention of the Roman and Florentine intelligentsia.<sup>489</sup>

The chapter will start with a wide description of Italian interventionism in the years leading up to Italy's involvement in the war (1915-1918), delineating the various nationalist groups and respective ideologies, which differentiated said movements from one another and made Reghini's stance unique. As will be clear from this section, three main interventionist groups can be singled out from the milieu which Reghini was familiar with: Enrico Corradini's *Associazione Nazionalisti Italiani* (Italian Nationalist Association), which, after a brief flirtation with the *Risorgimento* Socialist and anti-bourgeoisie ideals, turns towards a more anti-parliamentary and anti-Socialist 'anti-Mazzinian nationalism';<sup>490</sup> the *Risorgimento* inspired movement that was left after Corradini's Association's change of heart, led by Cesare Battisti (1875-1916), which saw the war as a Fourth War of Independence;<sup>491</sup> the left-wing interventionists, who championed a form of revolutionary syndicalism (*sindacalismo rivoluzionario*), of which the three main agitators were Filippo Corridoni (1887-1915), leader of the Italian Union of Syndicates (*Unione Sindacale Italiana*), Benito Mussolini, who had just been expelled by the Socialist Party and had founded his own paper *Popolo d'Italia* (*The People of Italy*, est. 1914), and Futurist Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, who hailed war as 'the only cleanser of the world';<sup>492</sup> 'Imperialismo Pagano' made a strong argument in favour of its own, Pagan, imperialist and elitist ideas, locating the movement related to it, as I will argue, well outside the influence of other groups.

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<sup>489</sup> Sestito, *Figlio del Sole*, pp. 78-84; Sestito, through a scrupulous research, shows how, in those years preceding the war, Reghini was 'in the center of the attention of the group of Futurists and literary journals, such as *Lacerba*, which hosted the avant-garde of Italian culture and thought'.

<sup>490</sup> On Corradini, see chapters 3 and 4. On the *Associazione Nazionalista Italiana*, see Francesco Perfetti, *Il Nazionalismo Italiano dalle Origini alla Fusione col Fascismo* (Bologna: Cappelli, 1977); Adriano Roccucci, *Roma Capitale del Nazionalismo, 1908-1923* (Rome: Archivio Guido Izzi, 2001); Christopher Seton-Watson, *Italy from Liberalism to Fascism, 1870-1925* (London: Barnes & Noble, 1967).

<sup>491</sup> On Cesare Battisti and his ideas, see Stefano Biguzzi, *Cesare Battisti* (Turin: UTET, 2008) and Massimo Tiezzi, *L'Eroe Conteso. La Costruzione del Mito di Cesare Battisti negli anni 1916-1935* (Trento, Museo Storico in Trento, 2007).

<sup>492</sup> For Marinetti's succinct description of war as 'unica igiene del mondo', see Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, 'Il Manifesto Futurista', in *I Manifesti del Futurismo Lanciati da Marinetti – Boccioni – Carrà – Russolo – Balla – Severini – Pratella* (Florence: Lacerba, 1914) pp. 6-10.

A second section, comprising the main body of the chapter, will be devoted to a context analysis of ‘Imperialismo Pagano’: the methodology used, and the sense-making strategies adopted within the text will be clearly enunciated before the analysis itself. Quoting Alan McKee, I will try to make clear ‘the ways in which members of various cultures and subcultures [in this case occult subculture of the *Schola*,] make sense of who they are, and how they fit into the world they live’.<sup>493</sup> The primary text will be compared to relevant inter- text, which will range from works of the past, that Reghini refers to in crucial passages and other texts, and in turn highlight dominant socio-political discourses at the time of the article’s publication. The vital goal of this section will be tackling issues such as religion, class, nationality and the stark divide between the *Schola*’s identity and what John Hartley has come to describe as ‘wedom’ versus ‘theydom’: in other words, the singling out of the ‘other’.<sup>494</sup>

Finally, in a final section, I will sum up the evidence towards my main theses postulated in this chapter: chiefly that *Imperialismo Pagano* represents Reghini’s most influential document, from which the reader may yield many clues as to the nature of the *Schola Italica*; that Armentano and Reghini had distanced themselves from any political movement which did not advocate for a Pagan imperialist elite, which would have the duty of supervising the rebuilding of Italy after the war; finally, that the appeal of occultism in Italy rapidly declined after World War I, even before the suppression of masonic lodges and occult circles by the Fascist regime.

## **2. INTERVENTIONISM AND NATIONALISM IN ITALY (1910-1914)**

### **2.1. THE LARGER PICTURE: ITALY AND NATIONALISM**

During the celebrations in Florence the night of 31 December 1913, a group of young revellers, no doubt after an evening of merriment at one of the literary cafés in the city centre, marched through the streets repeating a slogan, over and over again: ‘Long

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<sup>493</sup> Alan McKee, *Textual Analysis* (London: Sage, 2003), p.1.

<sup>494</sup> See John Hartley, *The Politics of Pictures: The Creation of the Public in the Age of Popular Media* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 206.



live imperialism!'. Among the boisterous youths, *Lacerba* collaborator Italo Tavolato (1889-1963),<sup>495</sup> future essayist and novelist Aldo Palazzeschi (1885-1974),<sup>496</sup> Teodor Daubler and, leading the group, Arturo Reghini. This scene perfectly captures the feelings and hopes of many young intellectuals who had constantly grown in number from the beginning of the century and had now become, on an intellectual level, if not on a political one, a force to be reckoned with. What had essentially changed, in the ten years leading up to 1914, were the perspectives and aims of the Italian Nationalists. Under the governments led by Giuseppe Crispi and Giovanni Giolitti (1842-1928) expansionism had created more problems than it had solved, and the gains had been negligible: on 2 May 1889, with the Treatise of Ucciali, Ethiopia and Italy agreed on Eritrea becoming an Italian protectorate;<sup>497</sup> an attempt to conquest Ethiopia itself on 1 March 1896 was met with a crushing defeat on behalf of the Italian forces led by Oreste Baratieri (1841-1901) near the city of Adua;<sup>498</sup> in the war against the Turks, during the years 1911-1912, Italy managed to annex Libya and the Dodecanese Islands, an archipelago between Greece and Turkey. A pyrric victory if ever there was one: the sun seemed to set very quickly over the Italian 'empire'.

The attention of the Nationalists thus moved towards the irredentist cause, which I have dealt with in the previous chapter, brought to an exasperation of politics, which had the effect of overshadowing any other political problem Italy may have had. To exemplify the multifaceted positions taken by some of the most prominent figures, a quote by future Fascist minister of Justice Alfredo Rocco (1875-1935), extrapolated from his pamphlet *Che cos'è il Nazionalismo e Cosa Vogliono i*

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<sup>495</sup> For Italo Tavolato, see idem, *Contro la Morale Sessuale* (Firenze: Gonnelli, 1913), and mostly his article, famous for being banned for explicit sexual contents, 'Elogio della prostituzione', in *Bestemmia contro la Democrazia*, ed. by Anna K. Valerio (Padova: Edizioni di Ar, 2009 [1914]): pp. 35-42.

<sup>496</sup> See Aldo Palazzeschi, *Il Codice Perelà* (Milan: Edizioni futuriste di Poesia, 1911); idem, *riflessi* (Florence: Cesare Blanc, 1908); *Roma* (Florence: Vallecchi, 1954).

<sup>497</sup> For the *Trattato degli Ucciali* see Indro Montanelli, *Storia d'Italia*, vol. 6 *1861 – 1919* (Milan: RCS, 2006), p. 221; a more in-depth narration on the event is written in Angelo del Boca, *Gli italiani in Africa orientale*, Vol. 1 (Milan: Mondadori, 1992), pp.343-357.

<sup>498</sup> A very useful primary source and first hand account of the Battle of Adua is Carlo Diotti, *Prigioniero d'Africa. La Battaglia di Adua e l'Impresa Coloniale del 1895-96 nel Diario di un Caporale Italiano* (Como: Nodolibri, 2006); Emilio Bellavita, *La Battaglia di Adua* (Rome: Gherardo Casini Editore, 2012); Domenico Quirico, *Adua: La Battaglia che Cambiò la Storia d'Italia* (Milano: Mondadori, 2004).

*Nazionalisti (What Nationalism Is and What Nationalists Want, 1914)*, will hopefully be explicative:

Nationalists therefore aren't liberal moderates, or better they are not essentially liberal moderates, aren't conservatives, aren't clerical, aren't democratic, neither radical, nor republicans; they are not, finally, socialists; while not dismissing the value of the problems which some of these parties puts forth (which explains how with some of these, sometimes, they may agree with them) they remain, characteristically nationalist, since they only give absolute value to the national problem and consider all others as subordinate.<sup>499</sup>

Following the evolution of nationalist thought embodied by thinkers such as Corradini and Federzoni, the nationalist idea seems to have gone through two distinct phases: the first one, propagated by journals such as *Il Regno* and *La Voce* in the early years of the twentieth century, when avant-garde and nationalist sentiments began mixing and going hand-in-hand; the second one where Corradini's Association of Italian Nationalists joined the political life of the early 1910s. During the first part, Corradini, and others, were more interested in a critique of positivism, materialism, 'contemporary cowardice' and 'ignoble socialism', proposing itself as an intellectual crusade against 'moral decay';<sup>500</sup> the second phase was marked by a more realistic approach to the problems Italy was facing: a poor economical situation, a disastrous imperialist campaign, a shaky political environment (Nationalists under the Giolitti government used to refer to Italy as *Italietta*, or 'poor little Italy') and a rise in unrest

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<sup>499</sup> Alfredo Rocco, *Cos'è il Nazionalismo e Cosa Vogliono i Nazionalisti*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Rome: Associazione Nazionalista, 1914): p. 10: 'I nazionalisti quindi non sono liberali moderati, o per meglio dire non sono essenzialmente liberali moderati, non sono conservatori, non sono clericali, non sono democratici, né radicali, né repubblicani; non sono, infine, socialisti; sebbene non disconoscano il valore dei problemi che taluno di questi partiti pone innanzi (il che spiega che con taluni di essi, in date circostanze, possano andare d'accordo) restano sempre, caratteristicamente nazionalisti, perché danno valore assoluto solo al problema nazionale e considerano tutti gli altri come subordinati'.

<sup>500</sup> Francesco Perfetti, 'La Dottrina Politica del Nazionalismo Italiano: Origini e Sviluppo Fino al Primo Conflitto Mondiale', in *Il nazionalismo in Italia e in Germania fino alla Prima Guerra Mondiale*, ed. by Rudolfo Lill (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1983), pp. 226-7: 'codardia contemporanea', 'ignobile socialismo' and 'degrado morale'.

among workers' syndicates.<sup>501</sup> The process of coagulating a stream of irrationalist ideas and to create a movement that could stand up to the parties in the government, was reached by pure force and iconoclasm: the Nationalist movement's greatest successes were reached through a strong opposition to contemporary politics rather than for the cohesion of its ideas. Therefore, after having gained their first seats during the elections of 1913, Corradini and his followers synthesised their programme in the re-annexation of the Italian-speaking regions, which were still under foreign rule:

Italy knows that within the borders *immutably prescribed by its history and by its glory*, there is a population of heroes who for the defence of the hearth and of blood desperately fight the most fierce war ever fought, alone and beautiful. Italy knows that from Trieste to Pola, from Capo d'Istria to Trento, from Spalato to Fiume, one is the language, one the soul, one the hope that urges the help of all Italians for our last defence.<sup>502</sup>



Mussolini is detained during an interventionist rally in Rome

© Mary Evans Picture Library

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<sup>501</sup> See Elena Papadia, *Nel Nome della Nazione. L'Associazione Nazionalista Italiana in Età Giolittiana* (Roma: Archivio Guido Izzi, 2006), where the concept is often reiterated.

<sup>502</sup> Ettore Bassan, *Lotte Nazionali nella Venezia Giulia* (Rome: Pinci, 1915), pp. 6-7: 'L'Italia sa che entro i confini *immutabilmente prescritti dalla sua storia e dalla sua gloria*, vi è un popolo d'eroi che per la difesa del focolare e del sangue disperatamente combatte la guerra più feroce che mai fosse combattuta, solo e meraviglioso. [...] L'Italia sa che da Trieste a Pola, da Capo d'Istria a Trento, da Spalato a Fiume, una è la favella, una l'anima, una la speranza, una la voce che reclama il concorso di tutti gli italiani per l'ultima difesa'.

Now that the stance of the Italian Nationalist Association has been sketched, it is natural to ask oneself: what was the relationship between members of the *Schola Italica* and Corradini's coterie? As I will write in my analysis of Reghini's 'Imperialismo Pagano', the one main difference was the link to the Catholic Church. In 1912, universal suffrage had widened the bracket of voters to more than 8.5 million men, and the new voters, mostly those members of the working class against whom Reghini wrote in his articles, were likely to vote for the *Partito Socialista Italiano* (Italian Socialist Party).<sup>503</sup> To avoid a surge in power of the Socialists, Giolitti had conferred with aristocrat and representative of the Italian Catholic Electoral Union Vincenzo Ottorino Gentiloni (1865-1916). The aim was to create a joint front between Catholics and Liberals against the rising Socialist force and, while Giolitti promised to include Catholics of the Electoral Union in his future government, Gentiloni, after whom this agreement took its name, would scrutinise Giolitti's candidates and choose the ones who adhered more to Catholic ideals. The result was a landslide victory for Giolitti, which left democratic Catholics outside of the coalition, such as don Luigi Sturzo (1871-1959) and don Romolo Mutti (1870-1944), and without allies.<sup>504</sup> While the Catholics in Parliament were in favour of an intervention aside the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Germany, both Nationalists and the Democratic Catholics vied for an alliance with England and France.

## 2.2. REGHINI AND ROMAN TRADITIONALIST VOLUNTEERS

In this key period of Italian history, Reghini was busy writing new articles for *Salamandra*, which had been much in demand after the publication of *Imperialismo Pagano* in the first issue. His frequentation of the cafés in Piazza dell'Unità, the *Giubbe Rosse* and *Pazkowsky* were the only moments during which the Florentine thinker connected with the outside world to discuss current affairs with his friends

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<sup>503</sup> For the momentum of the Socialist Party in the years preceding the war, see Gaetano Arfé, *Storia del Socialismo Italiano 1892-1926* (Turin: Einaudi, 1965); Andrea Spiri, *Socialismo italiano. Cento anni di storia. Il PSI 1892-1992* (Milan: M&B Publishing, 2003); Giorgio Spini, *Le origini del socialismo* (Turin: Einaudi, 1982).

<sup>504</sup> Ministero dell'Interno, *Compendio dei Risultati delle Elezioni Politiche dal 1848 al 1958* (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato, 1963): pp. 56-7.

Guerrieri, Papi and Amendola: in a letter to Armentano, dated 27 May 1914, he had written:

The political situation is again serious. We will end in war with Austria; it seems like Austria wants it immediately, because we have not recovered from Libya yet, and Russia is not ready. [...] One thing is for sure: no ten days pass without some new problem rising.<sup>505</sup>

In another document, his anticlerical sentiments are excited once more. Again, in corresponding with Armentano, he writes that

‘[y]ou will have probably seen that the Nationalist Congress in Milan has accentuated the clerical aspect of this party; a new daily nationalist newspaper will see the light of day under the auspices of the Bank of Rome’.<sup>506</sup>

The letter ends with an enigmatic sentence by Reghini: ‘The time must have come to act in the imperial sense’.<sup>507</sup> What exactly was meant by this is left to speculation: it is unclear whether Reghini is speaking about occult magical operations or about something more mundane. What is true, as I will write, is that Reghini credited Armentano and his magic for some of the success Italy had during the Great War, so the idea of a use of magical powers in order to allegedly bolster the imperial idea is not so far-fetched.

The summer was spent by Reghini in Scalea, with his master, practicing magic and discussing about politics, esotericism and Freemasonry. There they were joined by many guests, most of whom were interested in Armentano’s and Reghini’s heathen-imperialist ideas: Augusto Hermet, Giorgio Amendola, Enrico Salvi were only a few

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<sup>505</sup> Sestito, *Figlio del Sole*, p. 100: ‘La situazione politica si fa di nuovo seria. Coll’Austria va a finire in una guerra; pare che l’Austria la desideri subito perché noi non siamo ancora rimessi dalla Libia , e la Russia non è pronta[...]. Certo è che non passano dieci giorni senza una questione nuova’.

<sup>506</sup> In truth, it was a society created *ad hoc* by FIAT vice-president Dante Ferraris (1868-1931), which allowed the *Idea Nazionale* (*National Idea*), to become a daily paper, after a long existence as a weekly journal.

<sup>507</sup> Sestito, *Figlio del Sole*, p. 100: ‘Il momento sarebbe giunto per agire in senso imperiale’.

of the people who went to the *Schola's* headquarters in Calabria. It seems safe to say that these pre-war years represented the height of Armentano's and the School's prestige. As Roberto Sestito aptly summarises,

it was a summer full of meetings and reunions, during which discussions on politics intertwined with historical and philosophical debates on the spiritual union of the Italians, while the European war knocked heavily on the irredentist borders of the Motherland.<sup>508</sup>

By the beginning of 1915, writing to Armentano, Reghini confided that all of his friends had received a warning to be prepared to leave at very short notice. Reghini's brother too, was ready to go, and all members of the *Schola Italica* had volunteered to be among the first to go to the front. Reghini was shocked, when during the military medical examination he was rejected and deemed unfit to participate in the conflict.<sup>509</sup> Armentano, Guerrieri and futurist author Ottone Rosai (1895-1958) were the first among Reghini's friends to leave, abandoning their friend in Florence, who would then decide to spend his time focusing on methods of clairvoyance to use once at the front.<sup>510</sup> By the use of a secret substance prepared by Armentano, called *ortica mistica* (mystic nettle) and possibly containing hashish and other mind-altering substances, Reghini was sure that he had achieved a proficient level:

You realise it can work against Jesuits and Austrians. I would put myself at the service of General Cadorna, after having proven its validity to him. Do not think that I am exaggerating or that I have lost my mind. I just wanted

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<sup>508</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 102: 'Fu un'estate ricca di incontri e di riunioni, nel corso delle quali le discussioni politiche si intrecciavano con discussioni storiche e filosofiche dell'unità spirituale degli italiani, mentre la guerra europea batteva rumorosamente ai confini irredenti della patria'.

<sup>509</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 102.

<sup>510</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103: 'We took one pill each, and then I showed him [friend Giannotto Bastianelli (1883-1927)] and Franchi what I desired. I will only say that at my *fiat lux* a lightbulb three meters away from us switched on; and then at another *fiat lux* it switch on and off, along with all the lights along the road'. For more on the mysterious mystic nettle substance, see Piero Fenili, 'La Scuola Italica e l'Ortica Mistica', *Politica Romana* 6 (2000-2004), p. 309-313.

to try, the thing worked; at least there is a direct transmission of thought, which is something.<sup>511</sup>

When the last of his friends had left and joined the military, Reghini was in a state of constant isolation. It was a chance for him to observe from the outside how the tenets expressed in his *Imperialismo Pagano* fared when confronted with the harsh reality of war. In a letter to Armentano, dated 11 July 1915, he wrote: ‘if there wasn’t the possibility to forget everything within my philological research, I’d be going through bad times. [...] but I have faith in all that prodigious transcendence with which we’ve had contact many times!’<sup>512</sup>

### 3. 1914: *HEATHEN IMPERIALISM*. A TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

#### 3.1. THE CONTEXT OF *IMPERIALISMO PAGANO*

Before delving into the analysis of *Heathen Imperialism* I would like to present the text in its context, answering a series of questions, which were formulated by communication theorist Harold Lasswell in 1948: according to Lasswell, ‘a convenient way to describe an act of communication is to answer the following questions: ‘Who/ Says What/ In Which Channel/ To Whom/ With What Effect’.<sup>513</sup> This method may be dated, and it will not be used as a methodology to examine the text in question, but I believe that answering those questions will embed my textual analysis into a clearer context, making it easier for the reader to follow me in the interpretation of the work.<sup>514</sup>

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<sup>511</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103: ‘Tu capisci che può ben servire contro i Gesuiti e gli Austriaci. Io mi metterei a disposizione di Cadorna, dopo avergliene dato la prova. Non credere che esageri; né perda la testa. Ho voluto provare, la cosa è riscusa; per lo meno vi è una trasmissione di pensiero che è già qualcosa’.

<sup>512</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 105: ‘e se non fosse la possibilità di dimenticare tutto dentro le mie ricerche filologiche passerei dei brutti momenti [...]. Ma ho fede in tutto quel prodigioso trascendente di cui abbiamo avuto tante volte il contatto!’

<sup>513</sup> See Harold Lasswell, *The Structure and Function of Communication in Society. The Communication of Ideas* (New York: Institute for Religious and Social Studies, 1948), p. 117.

<sup>514</sup> For an improvement on Lasswell’s formula, see Richard Braddock, ‘An Extension of the “Lasswell Formula”’, *Journal of Communication* 8 (1958), pp. 88-93.

As briefly discussed in the introduction of this chapter, by 1914 Reghini had reached a unique position in the cultural milieu of his native Florence and of certain Roman circles: he was hailed as one of the greatest thinkers of his time by the Futurists, who wrote for the journal *Lacerba*: about his position, Sestito has written: ‘In Florence, rumour had it that he was the true leader of the Futurists and that Futurism wasn’t just a movement animated by artistic and literary motivations, but that within it hid a philosophical and pagan soul’.<sup>515</sup> Moreover, he was widely revered by the small group of fellow Pythagoreans of the *Schola*, who had accepted Armentano’s decision to make Reghini the official spokesman for his coterie of occultists, a position, which Reghini had accepted gladly.<sup>516</sup> Most of the people he frequented at literary cafes and journals’ editorial offices, from Papini to poet Theodor Däubler (1876-1934)<sup>517</sup>, from *Schola* member Giulio Guerrieri (nd.) to friend, Theosophist and irredentist Augusto Agabiti (1879-1918)<sup>518</sup>, all shared a pagan, elitist and imperialist political outlook, although none of these had the right qualities to jot down these political ideas in a succinct and coherent manifesto: this task would be left to Reghini, who, in a letter dated 12 September 1913, had written to Armentano that he would be dedicating himself to a *serio lavoro*, a serious task, in the

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<sup>515</sup> Sestito, *Figlio del Sole*, p. 78. ‘A Firenze si mormorava che il vero capo dei futuristi fosse proprio lui e che il futurismo non fosse un movimento animato solo da ambizioni artistiche e letterarie, ma che in esso si celasse un’anima filosofica e pagana’.

<sup>516</sup> For a brief analysis of the spokesperson in modern esotericism and New Religious Movements, see Olav Hammer, *Claiming Knowledge*, pp. 28-31, where Bruce Lincoln’s theories on power and authority are re-elaborated and adapted to an esoteric framework. See also Bruce Lincoln, *Authority: Construction and Corrosion* (Chicago: University Press of Chicago, 1994).

<sup>517</sup> For more information on Däubler in English, see the seminal Raymond Furness: ‘Theodor Däubler’, in *Zarathustra 's Children*, pp. 152 – 172; Carola von Edlinger, *Cosmogonic and Mythical World Designs of Inter-Discursive Perspective. Studies on Phantasia (Arno Holz), Northern Lights (Theodor Däubler) and The Ball (Otto zur Linde)* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2002); Thomas Keller, ‘World Experience and Foreign experience. The mythology in Theodor Daubler’, in *Mysticism and Modernity in Germany around 1900*, ed. by Moritz Bassler and Hildegard Chatellier: (Strasbourg: Presses Universitaires, 1998), pp. 255-278.

<sup>518</sup> Augusto Agabiti, close friend of Reghini’s, would be one of the many intellectuals to find his death during the Great War, succumbing to Spanish fever while on leave in Rome. Staunch Theosophist and editor of the journal *Ultra* in 1914, he was a virulent anti-vivisectionist and an admirer of the figure of philosopher Hypatia of Alexandria. For more on his works, see Augusto Agabiti, *Il Problema della Vivisezione: Testi delle Principali Disposizioni Legislative Vigenti negli Stati Moderni* (Rome: Enrico Voghera, 1911); idem, *Ipazia, la Prima Martire della Libertà di Pensiero* (Rome: Enrico Voghera, 1914); and his posthumous memoir from the front, *Sulla Fronte Giulia: Note di Taccuino 1915-1916-1917* (Naples: Società Editrice Partenope, 1919).



last months of the year.<sup>519</sup> In this letter, Reghini expressed the urgency of writing something of impact, which could create a future political base to build upon, and seeing that *Imperialismo Pagano*, was published in January 1914, it is natural to think that the topic of conversation was most probably the article itself. Reghini had spent his summer at the *Schola*'s headquarters in Scalea, and the main topic of debate had been, as we can glean from the correspondence dating September to December 1913, the constitution of a political movement founded upon the Italic tradition.<sup>520</sup> The chapter is divided into four distinct sections: an brief introduction, where the author grounds his theoretical framework in the historical period of the day; 'Empire and Christendom', where he discusses about the fall of the Roman empire and the alleged major role played by the rise of Christianity; a third part called 'The Imperial Tradition', where Reghini goes at lengths to provide the reader with the idea of an unbroken chain of imperialists, including Vergil, Dante and Petrarch; a final fourth one, in which the author continues with his list of imperialists throughout the centuries, citing Machiavelli, Bruno, Campanella, and of course Garibaldi and Mazzini. A short, half page epilogue wraps up the article, with Reghini's considerations on the present day, his critique of Italian nationalism and his usual dose of anticlericalism.

The Roman journal *Salamandra*, described as 'amorphous' by Augusto Hermet, was edited by Giovanni Mori, who had been, as we have seen in previous chapters, a Masonic brother and good friend of Reghini's.<sup>521</sup> The adjective amorphous was probably used by Hermet because, before the journal's ideology and direction could take shape, Mori had abandoned the project after only three issues:<sup>522</sup> its short life-span, though, was characterised by a moderately wide readership, and a lively reader-editor letter exchange. Reghini would pen 'La Tragedia del Tempio' (The Tragedy of the Temple), an article on the Knights Templar, for the second issue, and a critique of Theosophy, which anticipated Guénon's *Le Théosophisme* by seven years

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<sup>519</sup> Sestito, *Figlio del Sole*, p. 78.

<sup>520</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

<sup>521</sup> Hermet, *La Ventura*, p. 282.

<sup>522</sup> As I have written in the previous chapter, Mori had met Reghini in 1904, when Reghini had been initiated in the *Lucifero* lodge in Florence. Mori then followed Reghini and Armentano after the foundation of the *Rito Filosofico Italiano*.

had been in the works for the third.<sup>523</sup> Its title was supposed to have been ‘I Santi Padri della Teosofia: Besant, Leadbeater, Steiner’ (‘The Holy Fathers of Theosophy: Besant, Leadbeater, Steiner’), but the interruption in the publication of *Salamandra* forced Reghini, who felt he could not publish it elsewhere, to abandon this project in a very early draft form.<sup>524</sup>

The reaction to the publication of *Imperialismo Pagano* was noticeable, in Roman and Florentine circles, but also abroad: as Sestito writes: ‘[the publication] brought upon him, as was expected, the critiques of the vast majority of readers, who did not possess a background in classical and pagan culture’.<sup>525</sup> The strong anti-Christian character of the article was denounced by most of the critics, especially from his old Theosophical friends, always precariously balancing the ideas of Christianity and Eastern traditions.<sup>526</sup> Reghini’s response to his critics was harsh and brief, in the author’s typically dry wit: on 4 February 1914 he had written to Armentano: ‘[I despise] this universal tomfoolery. The will to make things take their course will prevail against everyone and everything: by that I mean imposing oneself by means of culture, art and fist-fights’.<sup>527</sup> The Italian Grand Orient, GOI, pressured Mori to include a leaflet, which stated clearly that GOI distanced itself from the imperialist ideas of the author.<sup>528</sup> Even Papini, one of Reghini’s oldest friends, criticised the archaising structure of the ideas contained in *Imperialismo Pagano*, but ‘many youths who frequented the literary cafes of Florence were fascinated by his patriotism, and we’ll witness Däubler, a refined lyric poet, overwhelmed by a new imperialist mysticism, compose his exuberantly beautiful *Inni all’Italia* [sic] (Hymns to Italy, 1916)’.<sup>529</sup> According to Sestito, and I concur with his conclusion,

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<sup>523</sup> See Guénon, *Le Théosophisme*.

<sup>524</sup> Reghini, ‘I Santi Padri della Teosofia: Besant, Leadbeater, Steiner’ (Florence: unpublished manuscript, 1914), manuscript to be found in the Reghini-Armentano Archive of Roberto Sestito in Sao Paulo, Brazil.

<sup>525</sup> Sestito, *Figlio del Sole*, p. 81. ‘Ma gli attirò addosso, come era da aspettarsi, le critiche della stragrande maggioranza dei lettori digiuni di cultura classica e padana’.

<sup>526</sup> *Ibid.*, p.82-83.

<sup>527</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82: ‘universale cretineria. Finirà col prevalere la volontà di far andare le cose avanti a dispetto i tutto e tutti; vale a dire imponendosi a forza di cultura, di arte e di botte’.

<sup>528</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.

<sup>529</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82: ‘molti giovani che frequentavano i caffè letterari di Firenze rimasero affascinati dal suo patriottismo e vedremo un Däubler, poeta lirico raffinato, travolto dal nuovo misticismo imperialista, comporre gli *Inni All’Italia* di esuberante bellezza’. The actual

*Heathen Imperialism* was the article that was destined to signal a change in the Italian esoteric world, because it broke with a habit of fear and a submission of Italian pride and dignity towards political and religious powers, mostly foreign or of foreign origin, a rupture modelled on the thought of the great national seers.<sup>530</sup>

Who these so-called seers were for Reghini and his *sodales* will be clearer in the next paragraphs. Now that I have briefly tackled the ‘Who /said what /in which channel /to whom /with what effect’ in a very cursory, but I hope satisfactory manner, an analysis of the text itself is necessary.

### 3.2. ‘INTRODUCTION’

The article begins with an epigraph from Dante Alighieri’s (1265-1321) *Monarchia* (‘Monarchy, 1308-1312/3): the epigraph, taken from the second book of Dante’s work, reads ‘the Roman People were appointed to rule by nature’. Since the beginning, by the use of this sentence, Reghini puts no doubt in the Roman character of his endeavour: not only did his idea of imperialism have to be pagan in nature, but it also had to stem from a tradition of which Dante was one of the greatest representatives and much will be written about him in the next paragraph.<sup>531</sup>

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name of Däubler’s composition was *Hymne an Italien*, in the singular form, see Theodor Däubler, *Hymne an Italien* (Munich: Georg Muller, 1916).

<sup>530</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82: “‘Imperialismo Pagano’ fu l’articolo destinato a segnare una svolta nel mondo esoterico italiano, perché ruppe una consuetudine di timori e di sottomissione dell’orgoglio e della dignità italiana verso i potentati politici e religiosi, nella maggior parte stranieri o di origine straniera, rottura modellata sul pensiero dei grandi vati nazionali’.

<sup>531</sup> Dante’s *Monarchia* (and not *De Monarchia*, as many, Reghini himself, tend to write) deals with the then thorny issue of temporal power: where Dante did not dispute the power the Pope had in spiritual matters, or any idea pertaining to the next life, which Dante saw possessing a higher quality than worldly life, he was adamant that temporal power should be assigned to a new Holy Roman Emperor, who would balance theocratic power, which was a strong force in early fourteenth-century Italy. Pope Boniface VIII (ca. 1230-1303) had made claims to temporal power in Florence, and this might have been the reason behind Dante’s distrust of the Holy See. The book was banned in 1585 by the Catholic Church.

The introduction offers the reader a panoramic view of the Italian political milieu, paving the way for an analysis of a new form of Imperialism to be postulated by Reghini: this section focuses on two main issues, the critique of democracy and that of the Catholic Church, and his opening comment on democracy needs to be quoted in full:

In the recent political elections, universal suffrage, extreme corollary of democratic postulates, has brought us to the triumph of oversimplification. The two parties, thus, who have seen their votes rise the most, are without doubt the clerical and the socialist. Evident sign that the arguments and the promises utilised were by nature more accessible and welcomed by the majority of the vast, illiterate majority of voters, much more than the ideas of other parties could.<sup>532</sup>

Several considerations may be made about this opening statement. Firstly, from a strictly political point of view, it seems clear that, without the support of said masses, any party would have struggled to emerge, and if indeed Reghini would have presented a new, elitist, antidemocratic and antisocialist party, in a country that would have remained a democracy until 1923, the chances of political victory would have been drastically low. From a sociological point of view, the fracture between the maybe 300 people to whom this article was directed to, paled when compared to the democratic electorate, which Reghini treated as mere statistical numbers: the gap between these two groups was profound, for culture, competence, desires, and expectations.<sup>533</sup> Lumping all of his most disliked political traits into one sentence,

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<sup>532</sup> Reghini, 'Imperialismo Pagano', p. 70: 'Nelle recenti elezioni politiche il suffragio universale, estremo colrollario dei postulati democratici, ci ha portato al trionfo del semplicismo. I due partiti, infatti, che più han visto aumentare il numero dei propri voti sono stati senza dubbio il clericale ed il socialista. Segno evidente che le argomentazioni e le promesse usate da questi partiti erano per loro natura piu' accessibili e più gradite alla mentalità della grande maggioranza, analfabeta, degli elettori, che non potessero esserlo le idee degli altri partiti'.

<sup>533</sup> In reality, according to the data provided by the Italian *Ministero degli Interni*, the election of 1913 did not really go the way Reghini describes it: Giovanni Giolitti's *Partito Liberale Italiano* (Italian Liberal Party) gained 47.6% of the votes, granting 270 of its politicians a seat in Parliament. It is true that through the Gentiloni Pact, named after Count Vincenzo Ottorino Gentiloni, the *Unione Elettorale Cattolici Italiana* (Electoral Italian Catholic Union) were allies with the Liberals, but only a 4.2% of the Italian people voted for this party. The other clerical party that ran for these elections, *Cattolici Conservatori* (Conservative Catholics),

Reghini lamented that ‘illiteracy, oversimplification and internationalisation, bound together, have therefore won to the greater glory of the parliamentary regime’.<sup>534</sup> Reghini then goes on to criticise the first of his two targets: the variety of Nationalist groups, which gravitated towards Corradini’s Italian Nationalist Association. While never mentioning the name of the association or of its president, he is adamant in stating that there was ‘no party to this date in Italy with which the national conscience can identify itself trustingly’.<sup>535</sup> Reghini, possibly moulding reality to suit his needs, attributes a clerical element to Corradini’s Nationalists: as we have seen, the movement had started following a strict, Risorgimento way of conjugating the politics of their time with a very lay approach, but had ultimately abandoned those positions in lieu of less extreme manifestations of political expression: if in the three years between 1908 and 1910, Corradini had preached in favour of a *Nazione Proletaria* (Proletarian Nation), just before the elections of 1913, the movement had co-opted industrialist magnates and members of the bourgeoisie, and a movement more moderate, clerical and anti-Socialist in nature was born, that of the *Conservatori Nazionali* (National Conservatives), whose aspirations may be summed up in this quote by their leader Ezio Maria Gray (1885-1969) from a 1914 newspaper article: ‘We affirm the necessity of an association, which may take to the defence of the grand national institute threatened by socialism. All class interest will be judged not by way of their separation, but in their union coordinated with national interest’.<sup>536</sup> Gray would later become an important figure in the budding Fascist regime, and participated in the march on Rome, that ultimately brought Fascism to power.<sup>537</sup> In sum, if the ANI had any reason to be considered on the same side as

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gained mere 1.8%. Where Reghini was right in his political commentary was his analysis of the *Partito Socialista Italiano* (Italian Socialist Party), which, with 17.2% of the votes, was the second biggest party in the country.

<sup>534</sup> Reghini, ‘Imperialismo Pagano’, p. 71: ‘Analfabetismo, semplicità ed internazionalismo, stretti in fascio, han dunque vinto insieme a maggior gloria del regime democratico’.

<sup>535</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71: ‘[...] ora in Italia nessun partito col quale la coscienza nazionale possa fiduciosamente identificarsi’.

<sup>536</sup> Ezio Maria Gray, ‘Untitled’, *La Nazione* 8 Jan 1914, p. 12: ‘Noi affermiamo la necessità di un’associazione che assuma la difesa del grande istituto nazionale minacciato dal socialismo. Tutti gli interessi di classe verranno valutati non nella loro separazione, bensì nella loro unione coordinata nell’interesse nazionale’.

<sup>537</sup> Ezio Maria Gray was a fundamental figure during the early years of the Fascist regime. Part of six legislatures under the Mussolini government, he was vice-president of the Chamber of Deputies in the thirtyninth Legislation, from 1935 to 1939. He was staunch anti-socialist and close to the strong powers of high finance and politics: for more on this figure, see Philip Rees, *Biographical Dictionary of the Extreme Right Since 1890* (New York:

Pope Pius X (1835-1914), it is because both shared an utter distaste for the direction, which lay society, on the one hand, and clerical modernism, on the other, were heading. Pius X was by all means an upholder of traditional Christianity, his aim being to bring back the church from what he considered to be the greatest danger of all for the Vatican: modernist priesthood.<sup>538</sup> When talking of modernist priests, his ideas were very clear and his resolve was unwavering: '[t]hey want them to be treated with oil, soap and caresses. But they should be beaten with fists. In a duel, you don't count or measure the blows, you strike as you can'.<sup>539</sup> Catholicism, as I shall also point out in the next two chapters, was an obsession for Reghini, and an evil that had to be extirpated before the possibility for a heathen imperialist movement could even take action. Its presence was everywhere, according to the Florentine philosopher, and it seemed that little could be done to stop its expansion in temporal power:

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Schuster & Son, 1991), p. 266; Philip Rees, *Fascism and Pre-fascism in Europe, 1890-1945: A Bibliography of the Extreme Right* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1984); an Italian biography was published in 2015: Valerio Zinetti, *Ezio Maria Gray. Un Italiano Fedele alla Patria* (Milan: Edizioni Ritter, 2015); Paolo Nello, 'La Vocazione Totalitaria del Fascismo e l'Equivoco del Filofascismo Liberale e Democratico. Il caso di Pisa (1919-1925)', *Storia Contemporanea*, 20:4 (1989), pp. 656-663.

<sup>538</sup> Modernism, or Theological Modernism was an attempt to link religious preoccupation with the major happenings and themes of the twentieth century: Revelation was thus not a message from God, or Jesus, but the realisation of one's subconscious at work; the Bible was a collection of myths and in no way a narration of factual events; faith was no longer considered to be an objective fact, but a subjective feeling, different for every person. For a history of the Theological Modernist phenomenon, see Maurilio Guasco, *Modernismo* (Rome: Edizioni Paoline, 1995); Marvin O'Connell, *Critics on Trial: An Introduction to the Catholic Modernist Crisis* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1994); Roberto de Mattei, 'Modernismo e antimodernismo nell'epoca di Pio X', in *Don Orione Negli Anni del Modernismo*, ed. by Nichele Busi, Roberto De Mattei, Antonio Lanza and Flavio Peloso (Milan: Jaca Book, 2002), pp. 29-86; a book that connects esotericism to the birth of Theological Modernism is Adele Cerreta, *Le Origini Esoteriche del Modernismo: Padre Gioacchino Ambrosini e la Teologia Modernista* (Chieti: Edizioni Solfanelli, 2012), especially 'Le Origini Esoteriche del Modernismo', pp. 59-70, where ties between occultism, the Theosophical Society and Theological Modernism are attempted and listed.

<sup>539</sup> John Cornwell, *Hitler's Pope: The Secret History of Pius XII* (London: Penguin, 2008), p. 37. Pius X died in the same year 'Imperialismo Pagano' was published, but his battle against Theological Modernism began in 1907, with the publication of *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* (*Feeding the Lord's Flock*), where in point 39, Pius X had written, after a lengthy analysis of the phenomenon: 'can anybody who takes a survey of the whole system be surprised that We should define it as the synthesis of all heresies?' An oath against Modernism was introduced in 1910 in *Motu Proprio Sacrorum Antistitum* (*Bishops, Out of Their Own Accord*), a true Antimodernist oath, whereby any member of the clergy had to declare that 'I am completely opposed to the error of the modernists who hold that there is nothing divine in sacred tradition', or 'reject that method of judging and interpreting Sacred Scripture which, departing from the tradition of the Church, the analogy of faith, and the norms of the Apostolic See, embraces the misrepresentations of the rationalists'. See Pius X, 'Motu Proprio Sacrorum Antistitum', in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* vol. II (1910), n. 17, pp. 655-680.

Bad times are upon us! And the progress of Catholicism in protestant countries is a meagre consolation for so many ailments: in Germany where the Emperor needs the votes of the Catholic Centre; in England and the United States where the Catholic cult, more *picturesque* than the various protestant cults, is continuously gaining ground.<sup>540</sup>

Reghini then sums up the introduction with the individuation of two changes in Italian society, which made the Church as the biggest enemy for heathen imperialism: war, which has awoken nationalistic sentiments, and universal suffrage, which has made the voting masses easily manipulated by the *longa manus* of the Clerical activists engaged into politics. By not asking an official return of temporal power to the Vatican, Reghini's sees the Church's involvement in politics as a shrewd, cunning move. Talking as an hypothetical member of the clergy, the author concludes his introduction writing: '[i]n this way, even the worst amongst troubles that has befallen the Church of Rome, the formation of Italy as a united and independent country, will end up benefiting us [the Church of Rome]'.<sup>541</sup>

### 3.3. *IMPERO E CRISTIANESIMO* (EMPIRE AND CHRISTENDOM)

The first section of *Heathen Imperialism* opens with a full-frontal attack against the Church of Rome and the malleable masses, which they so easily, according to the author, manage to entice and bring to submission.<sup>542</sup> In order to be a true nationalist, the good of the State and the good of the Church, must never cross paths: here lies Reghini's first crucial point of *Heathen Imperialism*, one that he would reiterate for the rest of his career as an author and public speaker:

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<sup>540</sup> Reghini, 'Imperialismo Pagano', p. 73: '*Mala Tempora Currunt!* E magro conforto ait anti guai é il progredire del Cattolicesimo nei paesi protestanti: in Germania dove l'Imperatore ha bisogno dei voti del centro cattolico; in Inghilterra e negli Stati Uniti dove il culto cattolico, più *pittoreesco* dei vari gruppi protestanti, guadagna continuamente terreno'.

<sup>541</sup> *Ibid.*, 'In questo modo anche il guaio piu' grosso che sia capitato alla Chiesa di Roma, la formazione dell'Italia a nazione unita e indipendente, finirà col ridursi a nostro beneficio'.

<sup>542</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74-5.

Now in our case there is a natural, fatal, deep, irreconcilable contrast. In the long succession of the centuries, from the foundation of the Church of Rome onwards, Papacy, always and always, has been the natural enemy of Rome and Italy. Latin civilization, eclectic, serene, open, in a word *gentile*, and the Roman empire with it, were suffocated by the exotic, intolerant, fanatic, dogmatic mentality of Christianity. And this is a crime that still awaits its expiation.<sup>543</sup>

The alleged negative influence of the Church of Rome is called to account for the failure of the imperial idea, which, according to Reghini, was a well-oiled machine of tolerance and acceptance before one god was chosen to be favoured upon many.<sup>544</sup>

Reghini then introduces, after Dante, the second of the greatest predecessors in the exaltation of Roman imperial ideas: Publius Virgilius Maro most commonly known as Vergil, Rome's own epic poet. It is curious that the work cited first in *Imperialismo* is not the epic classic *Aeneid* (29 BC-19 BC), considered by most Roman Traditionalists as the bible of Roman Imperialism, but a verse from the fourth of his *Eclogue*: a verse that has intrigued and fascinated a great number of thinkers throughout the centuries. Verse IV:6 is quoted in full by Reghini: 'Jam redit et Virgo, redeunt Saturnia Regna'.<sup>545</sup> From the years following the composition of the fourth

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<sup>543</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74: 'Ora nel nostro caso vi è contrasto naturale, fatale, profondo, incomponibile. Nella lunga serie dei secoli, dalla fondazione della Chiesa di Roma in poi, il Papato, sempre e poi sempre, è stato il naturale nemico di Roma e d'Italia. La civiltà latina, eclettica, serena, aperta, in una parola *gentile*, e l'impero romano con essa furono soffocati dalla mentalità esotica, intollerante, fanatica, dogmatica del cristianesimo. E questo è un delitto che attende ancora espiazione'.

<sup>544</sup> For text that exemplify Roman tolerance in conquered regions when it came to religious matters, see the fundamental text Mary Beard, John North and Simon Price, *Religions of Rome: A History*, 2 Vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); John B. Lott, *The Neighborhoods of Augustan Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Amy Chua, *Day of Empire: How Hyperpowers Rise to Global Dominance and Why They Fall* (New York: Doubleday, 2007), especially 'Tolerance in the Roman Empire, Gladiators, Togas and Imperial Glue', pp. 29-59; of course, intolerance was also shown, usually when the Emperor was not recognised as being of divine origins, and persecutions brought to the Jewish Wars and the persecution of Christians, in the first three centuries AD.

<sup>545</sup> Vergil, 'The Eclogues', IV:6, in *Loeb Classical Library 63 and 64: The Georgics, The Eclogues, The Aeneid Book I-VI*, trans. and ed. by H.R. Fairclough (Cambridge, MA: Harvard



Eclogue, many scholars have wondered about what the Saturnia Regna referred to, and the later mention of a *puer*, a child who would bring back a Golden Age sparked the curiosity of many a reader.<sup>546</sup> The nature of the Golden Age in this passage has been analysed by many classical scholars, Kenneth Reckford *in primis*, who linked Vergil's verses to the Hesiodic narration of an Age in which men lived with gods and did not have to toil in order to earn a living: a progressive degeneration of man, at some point, forced the gods to withdraw, leaving man to fend for himself. Such an anti-evolutionist approach to history would have no doubt tantalised Reghini, as a close comparison between Hesiod's myth and the doctrine of the Hindu *yugas* will prove. The idea of a spiralling condition of man was later adopted by Stoic philosophers, who believed in a cataclysmic 'destruction of the world by fire (ekpyrosis) [which] facilitated the acceptance of a cyclical view [...]'.<sup>547</sup> Vergil's IV *Eclogue* is not the only place where the reign of Augustus is seen as ushering a new golden age: *Aeneid* 1. 291-296 and 6. 791-794 are just as potent and convincing to the reader that the poet was simply doing his job as a political propagandist at the court of the Emperor.<sup>548</sup> Who then was the child who would usher in this age? For some scholars it was Asinius Gallus (d. 33 CE), son of Asinius Pollio (d. 4 CE) and one of Vergil's patrons, while for others it was the future child of Augustus himself and his wife Scribonia (68-16 BC): nevertheless, no matter how plausible these theories may be, from the time of Constantine,

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University Press, 1916): 'The Virgin maiden finally comes to us, and the reign of Saturn is back'.

<sup>546</sup> The full translation of the segment from which Reghini drew the verse recites thus: 'Now the Virgin returns, the reign of Saturn returns; now a new generation descends from heaven on high. Only do you, pure Lucina, smile on the birth of the child, under whom the iron brood shall at last cease and a golden race spring up throughout the world!'

<sup>547</sup> Kenneth Reckford, 'Some Appearances of the Golden Age', *The Classical Journal* 54:2 (1958), p. 80.

<sup>548</sup> Vergil, *Aeneid*, 1. 291-296: 'And the stern age be soften'd into peace: Then banish'd Faith shall once again return, And Vestal fires in hallow'd temples burn;/ And Remus with Quirinus shall sustain/ The righteous laws, and fraud and force restrain./ Janus himself before his fane shall wait, /And keep the dreadful issues of his gates/ With bolts and iron bar'; 6. 791-794: 'And this in truth is he whom/ you so often hear promised you, /Augustus Caesar, son of a god, /who will again establish a golden age in Latium/ amid fields once ruled by Saturn'.

there has long been a persistent belief that the child was Christ, and that Vergil in this little poem was prophesying something greater than the birth of a son to his friend Pollio, or to the imperial house of Rome [...].<sup>549</sup>

The interpretation of most Latin scholars considered the ‘Virgin’ to represent ‘Justice’, bringing a King, representing the beginning of imperial power, in the figure of a child. Constantine begged to differ: as Bourne writes, ‘the *virgo* is, of course, the Virgin Mary; she brings the king, who is Christ.’<sup>550</sup> After Constantine, many notable Church historians agreed with this thesis, including Lactantius (240-320), Augustine of Hippo (354-430), Abelard (1079-1142), and, of course, Dante, in his XX *Canto* of Purgatory.<sup>551</sup>

Reghini introduces this verse from Vergil, because his main aim, in this article, is to establish a chain of Roman imperialist thinkers who would buttress his ideas, and losing Vergil and Dante in one fell swoop would have meant an instant defeat of his argument. He thus proceeds to ridicule the Christian interpretation of Vergil’s verses in the IV Eclogue: the passage deserves to be quoted in full, to appreciate the virulence of Reghini’s rhetoric:

Vergil the great poet poet, had just sung the return of the golden age

*Jam redit et Virgo, redeunt Saturnia Regna,*

and prophesied the coming of a *veltro* [a greyhound] which the destroyers of the Vergilian ideal had the impudence of identifying with Jesus: here we have a megalomaniac, hypochondriac and sentimental, whose vision of the

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<sup>549</sup> Ella Bourne, ‘The Messianic Prophecy in Vergil’s Fourth Eclogue’, *The Classical Journal* 11:7 (1916) p.390. Other works discussing this fascinating and intricate topic include Edwin Floyd, ‘Vergil’s Eclogue 4’, *The Explicator* 56:1 (1997), p. 3; Cindy Vitto, *The Virtuous Pagan in Middle English Literature* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1989); Gian Biagio Conte, *Latin Literature: A History* (Baltimore: John Hopkins, 1999); Bruce Arnold, ‘The Literary Experience of Vergil’s Fourth “Eclogue”’, *The Classical Journal* 90:2 (1997), pp. 143-160; Paul Carus, *Virgil’s Prophecy on the Saviour’s Birth: the Fourth Eclogue* (Chicago: Open Court Publishing, 1918); for a Roman Traditionalist approach to the subject matter, see Nuccio d’Anna, *Virgilio e le Rivelazioni Divine* (Genoa: ECIG, 1989).

<sup>550</sup> Ella Bourne, ‘Messianic Prophecy’, p. 391.

<sup>551</sup> See Jan Ziolkowski, ‘Vergil, Abelard, Eloise and the End of Neumes’, *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 56 (2012), pp. 447-466.

world created by his God moved to compassion and tears, and made the new-fangled discovery that to fix humanity's affairs, all one needed was to make men better.<sup>552</sup>

Vergil talks about the greyhound in Dante's *Inferno*, telling his newly found disciple that 'he shall not feed on either land or wealth/ but wisdom, love and power shall be his food'.<sup>553</sup> The identity of the greyhound has been debated for centuries, but for many interpreters, the allusion referred to an emperor, who in the future would save Italy from the greedy hands of the she-wolf, with which Dante associated the Papal States.<sup>554</sup> Thus with one powerful paragraph, Reghini begins to delineate the lineage of his Roman imperial thought: by linking two great masters of Roman and Italian culture under the imperialist flag, Reghini is ready to move on to fiercer criticism towards the Church, upholstered by the figures of Vergil and Dante. In the following passages Reghini endeavours to explain the reason why the alien religion of Christianity took hold in the empire, and, according to the author, began to corrode it from the inside: the Roman empire, wrote Reghini, was founded on common law, untouched by matters of religion, and founded its power and existence upon the the knowledge of the empirical problems of life, with no theological speculation or abstraction.<sup>555</sup> Christianity seems to have snuck up from Judaea all the way to the heart of the empire, according to Reghini: 'when the emperors) became aware of the new trend it was too late. The infection had spread rapidly across the Empire, had reached the Urbs [Rome]; and even if the violence [literally iron and fire] had been used even more generously than unfortunately it had been, it could not have saved the

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<sup>552</sup> Reghini, 'Imperialismo Pagano', pp. 74-5: 'e profetizzato la venuta di un *veltro* che i distruttori dell'ideale virgiliano hanno avuto l'impudenza di identificare con Gesù; ed ecco un megalomane ipocondriaco e sentimentale, cui la visione del mondo creato dal suo Dio moveva a compassione ed al pianto, si credette il primo, l'unico savio spuntato in questa valle di lacrime, e fece la peregrina scoperta che per accomodare le faccende dell'umanità bastava rendere gli uomini migliori'.

<sup>553</sup> Dante Alighieri, *La Divina Commedia, Inferno*, I, vv. 110-111: 'Questi non ciberà terra né peltro,/ ma sapienza, amore e virtute'.

<sup>554</sup> For similar interpretations of the figure of the greyhound, see Robert Hollander, *Allegory in Dante's Commedia* (Cambridge, MA: Princeton University Press, 1969), pp. 89-91; Nicolò Mineo, *Profetismo e Apocalittica in Dante* (Catania: Facoltà Lettere e Filosofia, 1968); Paul Renucci, 'Dantismo Esoterico nel Secolo Presente', *Atti Congresso Internazionale di Studi Danteschi*, I (1965), pp. 305-332; Bruno Nardi, 'Il Concetto dell'Impero nello Svolgimento del Pensiero Dantesco', *Giornale Storico* LXXVIII (1921), pp. 1-52; on Luigi Valli, one of Dante's greatest esoteric exegesists, see the comprehensive study by Sarzani, *Luigi Valli*.

<sup>555</sup> Reghini, 'Imperialismo Pagano', p. 76.

West'.<sup>556</sup> To Reghini, this is the crux behind the decline of the West: Christianity, always alluded by the Florentine author as a disease, a malaise, an exotic syndrome, had managed to find its way through the Roman empire's chinks of armour, and had rotted the giant's corpse from the inside. 'A sentimental morbid mysticism drowned the healthy and serene Italian practicality, the Italian *prudencia* [Latin for foresight]; and the Roman eagle, accustomed to long flights, smeared its talons in the sticky sweetness of universal love'.<sup>557</sup> The paragraph ends with Reghini pointing to the Church's appropriation of the magical symbols, which had allowed Rome to prosper for centuries, and with a short list of events perpetrated by the Church, which helped facilitate the destruction of the Roman Empire. In the first instance, Reghini prominently refers to the magical force, which I have referred to throughout the thesis, which the author thought permeated the soil and air of the city of Rome itself, before alluding to the keys of Janus, which had become the keys of Peter, and the Roman institution of the *pontifex maximus*, the highest post in Republican Rome, was taken by the Church and used to this day to refer to the Pope.<sup>558</sup> The second grievance Reghini expressed regarded the first actions of the Church, once in a position of influence, all deriving from the creation of the Oriental Roman, or Byzantine, Empire, which, according to the author brought to a quick collapse of the Western empire 'political unity and the loss of the conscience of an Italian national unity for centuries upon end, the destruction of culture, thought, letters, arts [...]'.<sup>559</sup>

#### 3.4. LA TRADIZIONE IMPERIALE ROMANA (THE ROMAN IMPERIAL TRADITION)

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<sup>556</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76: 'Quando gli imperatori si accorsero della novità era troppo tardi. L'infezione si era rapidamente diffusa tramite l'Impero, era giunta sino nell'Urbe; ed il ferro ed il fuoco usati anche più generosamente di quanto pur troppo non lo siano stati non avrebbero potuto salvare l'Occidente'.

<sup>557</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76-7: 'Un misticismo morboso sentimentale annegava la sana e serena praticità italiana, l'italica *prudencia*; e l'aquila romana, agli ampi voli avvezza, s'impiastricciava gli artigli nel dolcime appiccicoso dell'amore universale'.

<sup>558</sup> For an exhaustive account on the figure of the *pontifex maximus*, see Renato del Ponte, *La religione dei Romani* (Milan: Rusconi, 1982).

<sup>559</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77: 'l'unità politica e la coscienza dell'unità nazionale perduta per secoli e secoli, il naufragio della cultura, del pensiero, delle lettere, delle arti [...]'

The second main section of *Imperialismo* begins on a very sombre note: Christianity has spread across the whole of Europe, and any trace of a pagan community seemed to have disappeared. Any attempt by the barbarian kings to re-establish a temporal realm in Rome had, in one way or the other, failed. The Italian imperial authority seemed to have disappeared forever. ‘Nevertheless’, Reghini writes, ‘even facts themselves took it onto themselves to show its necessity [of imperialism]’.<sup>560</sup>

Another religion, being born from Judaism and Christianity, threatened from Asia. Muslim fanaticism did not pale in comparison to the Christian one; from the remotest Arabia the Asian hordes made their way North towards Europe, and, along the road, they converted and overrun people with the persuasion of their scimitar.<sup>561</sup>

It is the Muslim migration westward, which, according to Reghini, rekindled a sense of necessity of an empire in the West, which could put a stop to the seemingly invincible Islamic threat. Charlemagne (742-814) represented a pivotal figure in Reghini’s narration of the development of the imperial idea in Europe. Reghini thus saw the advent of the Holy Roman Empire as a necessity felt by those who did not feel at ease with the domination of the Catholic Church: ‘the idea of a Roman empire, put in effect by Charlemagne, remained present in the conscience of peoples, and little by little became the secret hope of all the heretics, the ultimate goal of all secret societies which flourished in all of Europe from the 1000 to 1400’<sup>562</sup>. The modern scholar of Western esotericism may be surprised to read about a surge in the number of secret societies in these years, but in the following paragraph, Reghini gives us a clear idea of what he meant in his text:

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<sup>560</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78: ‘Pure i fatti si incaricarono di farne sentire la necessita’.

<sup>561</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78: ‘Un’altra religione, rampollando dall’ebraismo e dal cristianesimo, minacciava dall’Asia. Il fanatismo musulmano non faceva cattiva figura a petto di quello cristiano; dall’estrema Asia le orde asiatiche salivano su su verso l’Europa, e strada facendo convertivano e conquistavano i popoli con l’argomento della scimitarra’.

<sup>562</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78: ‘l’idea di un impero romano, attuata da Carlo Magno, restava oramai presente nella coscienza dei popoli, e diveniva a poco per volta la segreta speranza di tutti gli eretici, il fine ultimo di tutte le società segrete che dal mille al millequattrocento e dopo pullularono per tutta l’Europa’.

It is not possible to penetrate within the true spirit of those changes without knowledge of Gnosticism, of Manicheism, of the paganism of most of the heresies of the day, without having divined the mystical and political secret of chivalry, without having understood the gay science of the troubadours, and the jargon of the secret societies, and without having discovered the affinities and occult ties that bound together heretics and Ghibellines, inhabitants of Lombardy and Toulouse, wandering priests, troubadours and Knights Templar.<sup>563</sup>

The usually bleakly characterised epoch of the Dark Ages is here enchanted by Reghini, who, against the unconditional rule of the Church, saw many varied expressions of people oriented towards imperial temporal power. It is of no concern as to whether the Cathars, the Knights Templar and the Manicheans actually did share a belief in the importance of the presence a strong temporal power in Europe: from an anti-Clerical perspective, there is no doubt that this would have helped such persecuted groups. What matters most to the reader of *Imperialismo* is the creation of a strong imperialist and anti-Clerical narrative, which would bolster Reghini's conclusion, making it appear as if the idea of a lay, or pagan imperialism had always been present throughout European history.

After Charlemagne, Reghini turns once again to Dante: with the Florentine poet of the Divine Comedy, according to Reghini, an idea of a Pythagorean-roman monarchy, which would become the Italian imperialist tradition, first became conscious of the importance of its existence. Dante is thus inserted within the tradition of the great imperialists of the past, which had inspired Reghini and his group of friends. Namely, King Numa, Pythagoras, Julius Caesar, Vergil, Augustus 'and the other great Italians who came later on'<sup>564</sup> The creation of a clear and, to the author, plausible, string of wise pagan imperialists begins to take shape at the very centre of *Imperialismo*: Reghini's Traditionalism needs both a *prisca sapientia*, but most

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<sup>563</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78: 'Non è possibile penetrare nel vero spirito dei rivolgimenti di quel tempo senza una conoscenza dello gnosticismo, del manicheismo, del paganesimo di quasi tutte le eresie d'allora, senza aver divinato il segreto mistico e politico della cavalleria, senza aver compreso la gaia scienza d'amore dei trovatori, ed il gergo ed il simbolismo delle società segrete, e senza aver scoperto l'affinità e gli occulti vincoli che incatenavano tra loro eretici e ghibellini, lombardi e tolosani, fraticelli, trovatori e cavalieri del Tempio'.

<sup>564</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79: 'e gli altri grandi italiani venuti dopo'.

importantly a respectable list of *prisci sapientes*, who could justify the Roman Traditionalists' return to the ways of old. The rest of the second chapter of *Imperialismo* focuses on two legitimization theories related to Dante and his work.

Firstly, Reghini refutes the idea of a Christian Dante, explaining that he was forced, in order to compose his works in relative tranquility, to pose as a Christian in thirteenth-century Florence. The fact that his *Monarchia* had been successively banned by the church and his frequent words of devotion to Vergil were proof to Reghini of the pagan nature of Dante's message: '[b]ecause Dante, by great Jove and the good Apollo that he used to invoke, was not a Catholic and his imperialism was pagan and roman!', wrote Reghini.<sup>565</sup> Reghini continuously reminds the reader of the link between Vergil and Dante, especially in drawing parallels between the prophetic *Aeneid VI* and the *Comedy* itself: '[t]he isagoge is the same in both, it is the allegorical and sometimes categorical exposition of the metamorphosis of man in God; politically furthermore Vergil and Dante don't do anything apart from exalting the Roman Empire'.<sup>566</sup> The VI book of Vergil's *magnum opus* talks about Aeneas' descent into the underworld, in order to see his father Anchises, and experiences visions, which fit well with the Imperial propaganda that Vergil has peppered his poem with: to the startled Aeneas, Anchises shows the glorious future of Rome:

Turn your two eyes  
This way and see this people, your own Romans.  
Here is Caesar, and all the line of Iulus,  
All who shall one day pass under the dome  
Of the great sky: this is the man, this one,  
Of whom so often you have heard the promise,  
Caesar Augustus, son of the deified,  
Who shall bring once again an Age of Gold

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<sup>565</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79: 'Perché Dante, per il sommo Giove e per il buon Apollo che egli invocava, non era cattolico ed il suo imperialismo era pagano e romano!'

<sup>566</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80: 'L'isagogia è la stessa nei due, è l'esposizione categorica della metamorfosi dell'uomo in Dio; politicamente poi Virgilio e Dante non fanno che l'esaltazione dell'Impero Romano!'

To Latium, to the land where Saturn reigned

In early times [...].<sup>567</sup>

Secondly, Reghini insists on the symbolism present in the *Divina Commedia* as being imperial in essence: he describes the two most important symbols of Dante's *Paradiso* as the eagle 'the sacred bird which made the Romans be revered by the world', and the rosy-cross, 'which is not the mystic rose but the sectarian rose of the *Roman de la Rose*'.<sup>568</sup> The eagle, carried atop every military standard within the Roman army, is thus seen as the very symbol of imperialism, which unites Reghini's present to the glorious past he is trying to evoke, while the rosy-cross, which Reghini later links to the Fraternity of the Rose-Croix and to the eighteenth Masonic degree in the Antient and Accepted Scottish Rite, that of the *Sovereign Prince Rose Croix*, most probably alluded to the troubadours, and the alleged heretic imperialists in the south of France, and the *Roman de la Rose* (ca. 1230), a manual on courtly love written in France in medieval times, which probably enticed Reghini for the same thematic connection with the Italian *Fedeli d'Amore* (the Pledged to Love).<sup>569</sup> without going into too much detail, the *Fedeli d'Amore* were a supposed closed group of artists, whose work revolved around the allegory of love as a way to the divine, active in Italy during the end of the thirteenth century. Such an approach to poetry would have definitely have been influenced by the French troubadours just mentioned, and the French heresy of the Cathars, the so-called Church of Love, wiped out by the Catholic Church during the Albigensian Crusade of 1209-1229: scholar William Anderson describes the *Fedeli* as

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<sup>567</sup> Publio Vergilius Maro, *Aeneid*, VI – vv. 788-194: 'huc geminas nunc flecte acies, hanc aspice gentem/Romanosque tuos. hic Caesar et omnis Iuli /progenies magnum caeli ventura sub axem. /hic vir, hic est, tibi quem promitti saepius audis, /Augustus Caesar, divi genus, aurea condet /saecula qui rursus Latio regnata per arva /Saturno quondam [...]'. On the political allegories and interpretation of the *Aeneid*, see Michael C.J. Putnam, *Virgil's Aeneid: Interpretation and Influence* (Chapel Hill, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1995); Gunther Gottlieb, 'Religion in the Politics of Augustus: Aeneid 1.278-291, 8.714-23, 12.791.842', in *Virgil's Aeneid: Augustan Epic and Political Context*, ed. by Hans-Peter Stahl (London: Duckworth, 1998), pp. 21-36; Philip Hardie, *Virgil's 'Aeneid': Cosmos and Imperium* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989); Francis Cairns, *Virgil's Augustan Epic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Eve Adler, *Virgil's Epic: Political Thought in the Aeneid* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, 2003).

<sup>568</sup> Reghini, 'Imperialismo Pagano', p. 37: 'il santo uccello che fê i Romani al mondo reverendi' and 'che non é la rosa mistica ma sibbene la rosa settaria del Roman de la rose'.

<sup>569</sup> See *Debating the Roman de la Rose: A Critical Anthology*, trans. by Earl Jeffrey Richards, ed. by Christine McWebb (New York: Routledge, 2007).



rare spirits who were struggling to devise a code of life that retained from chivalry the idea of nobility, while making it depend on personal virtue instead of inherited wealth and breeding, and that preserved spiritual aspirations not unlike those of some mendicants without demanding a life of withdrawal or celibacy [... And forming] a closed brotherhood devoted to achieving a harmony between the sexual and emotional sides of their natures and their intellectual and mystical aspirations.<sup>570</sup>

According to Dante scholar Luigi Valli (1878-1931) and the Traditionalist thinker René Guénon, Dante had gotten in touch with this group, and had incorporated their ideas in his poetry: this obviously gave rise to a completely new school of interpretation of Dante, as can be noticed in books by Valli, Guénon, Reghini in this article, and many others, whereby the Florentine poet's works appear to have an esoteric core, which will elude the common reader. If these authors were to be believed, then, the *Commedia* would be a universal story of man's struggle to achieve proximity to God through love, with an imperialist twist thrown in for just measure, in Reghini's case.<sup>571</sup> As if realising the fact that he had probably thrown too many obscure references in order to explain in what was supposed to be a short and to the point article, Reghini ends the second section of his *Imperialismo* writing: 'but we will more diffusely deal with paganism and the imperialism of Dante some other time'.<sup>572</sup>

### 3.5. *L'IDEA IMPERIALE DOPO DANTE* (THE IMPERIAL IDEA AFTER DANTE)

The third section of *Imperialismo* aims to bring the reader up to date with regards to the imperial idea, from Dante to the author's day: Reghini starts by painting a dire picture of the political situation in Italy, alluding to a triumphant Church and the rise of the *comuni* and of the republics of Venice and Florence as too fragmented to really

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<sup>570</sup> William Anderson, *Dante the Maker* (London: Routledge & Keagan Paul, 1980), p. 80.

<sup>571</sup> The classic text is Luigi Valli, *Il Linguaggio Segreto di Dante e dei Fedeli d'Amore* (Rome: Optima, 1928-30).

<sup>572</sup> Reghini, 'Imperialismo Pagano', p. 81: 'Ma altra volta ci occuperemo più ampiamente del paganesimo e dell'imperialismo di Dante'.

foster an imperialist idea.<sup>573</sup> There were individuals, though, who carried on the imperial ideal, overtly or secretly embedding it in their writings, and such a list of characters forms the main part of the third section of *Imperialismo*. The first to be applauded by Reghini is Francesco Petrarca (1304-1374), who was a very close friend of Cola de Rienzi, otherwise known as Cola di Rienzo (1313-1354), a fourteenth-century politician of great prestige, who had advocated for the abolition of Papal temporal power and had sought to bring back Rome to its former imperial splendour.<sup>574</sup> That Petrarca had shared similar ideas is a confirmed fact in the studies devoted to his figure.<sup>575</sup> Perhaps not surprisingly, the next figure to be exalted as the forbearer of imperialist theories was the famous author and political thinker Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527). Rather than a mere return to a pristine form of greatness, Machiavelli could see the fragility of an Italian peninsula divided in many small city-states and advocated for the advent of an illuminated prince, who would take it upon himself to reunite the warring cities in Italy.<sup>576</sup> But, Reghini writes, ‘as Dante had never seen the

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<sup>573</sup> The *Età dei Comuni*, or Age of Communes, was a medieval period in Italy, where small cities ruled over the immediate land around its extension. The phenomenon, started during the eleventh century, expanded to France, Germany and, to a certain extent, England. It could be argued that the phenomenon manifested itself as the most obvious opposition to the Feudal system. For the Italian manifestation of this trend, see Franco Cardini and Marina Montesano, *Storia Medievale* (Firenze: Le Monnier Università, 2006); Mario Ascheri, *Le Città-Stato* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2006); Giuliano Milani, *I Comuni Italiani: Secoli XII-XIV* (Bari: Laterza, 2015).

<sup>574</sup> Cola di Rienzo (or dé Rienzi) was a medieval politician, hailed by Petrarch as the new Brutus and Romulus, who attempted an ill-fated unification of Italy: his legacy has been impressive, ranging from literary works (Edward Bulwer-Lytton’s *Rienzi, the last of the Roman tribunes* (1835) and *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* (1814-1818) by Lord Byron) to musical compositions such as Richard Wagner’s *Rienzi* (1842). For academic treatments of this historical figure, see Amanda Collins, *Greater than Emperor: Cola di Rienzo (ca. 1313–54) and the World of Fourteenth Century Rome* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press: 2002); Ronald Musso and Ronald G. Musto, *Apocalypse in Rome. Cola di Rienzo and the politics of the New Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Elizabeth Beneš, ‘Mapping a Roman Legend: The House of Cola di Rienzo from Piranesi to Baedeker’, *Italian Culture*, 26 (2008), pp. 53–83.

<sup>575</sup> See, for example, G. Baldassari, *Unum in locum. Strategie Macrotestuali nel Petrarca Politico* (Milan: LED Edizioni Universitarie, 2006); Guido Cappelli, ‘Petrarca e l’Umanesimo Politico del Quattrocento’, *Verbum* VII:1 (2005), pp. 53-75; Michele Feo, ‘Politicità del Petrarca’, *Quaderni Petrarqueschi* IX-X (1992-1993), pp. 116-128; for the standard text on Petrarch studies, see Victoria Kirkham and Armando Maggi, *Petrarch: A Critical Guide to the Complete Works* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

<sup>576</sup> Two bibliographies, one old and one more recent are Roberto Ridolfi, *The Life of Niccolò Machiavelli* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963) and Paul Oppenheimer, *Machiavelli: a Life Beyond Ideology* (New York: Continuum, 2011); see also L.J. Andrew Villalon, ‘Machiavelli’s *Prince*, Political Science or Political Satire?: Garrett Mattingly Revisited’, *Mediterranean Studies* 12 (2003), pp. 73-101; Harvey Mansfield Jr.,

pregnant Vatican she-wolf, Machiavelli too died without any prince heeding his call; and Machiavellian politics were taken and applied by the Company of Jesus to the detriment and not to the betterment of Italy and of the imperialist idea'.<sup>577</sup>

Reghini now turns to the Renaissance heroes of his, which he credited with the survival of the imperial idea in the southern part of Italy, namely Campania. It was the 'Southern Pythagoreans'<sup>578</sup> Giordano Bruno<sup>579</sup>, Bernardino Telesio<sup>580</sup> and Tommaso Campanella<sup>581</sup>, who, by revolting against Aristotelianism, which was then the most common approach to scholastic interpretation of Church ideas and dogmas, gave birth to a western lay culture, which, Reghini added,

is slowly disinfecting European mentality from Christianity. These mystics of the senses, these precursors and initiators of European philosophy, were not part of those lazy saints who retire to a Thebaides or a hermitage; they were fierce and brave men of action.<sup>582</sup>

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'Machiavelli's Political Science', *The American Political Science Review* 75:2 (1981), pp. 293-305.

<sup>577</sup> Reghini, 'Imperialismo Pagano', p. 82: 'come Dante non aveva veduto morire di doglia la lupa vaticana, anche il Machiavelli morì senza che alcun principe lo ascoltasse; e la politica machiavellica veniva di poi ripresa ed applicata dalla Compagnia di Gesù a danno e non a prò dell'Italia e dell'idea imperialista'.

<sup>578</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82: 'neo-pitagorici meridionali'

<sup>579</sup> Secondary sources on Giordano Bruno include Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*; Paul Richard Blum, *Giordano Bruno: An Introduction* (New York, NY: Rodopi, 2012); idem, *Giordano Bruno* (Munich: Beck Verlag, 1999); Ingrid D. Rowland, *Giordano Bruno: Philosopher/Heretic* (New York: Farrar, Staus and Giroux, 2008).

<sup>580</sup> See *Bernardino Telesio e la Cultura Napoletana. Atti del Convegno Internazionale, Napoli 15-17 Dicembre 1989*, ed. by Raffaello Sirri and Maurizio Torrini (Napoli: Guida, 1992), especially Mario Agrimi, 'Telesio nel Seicento Napoletano', in *Bernardino Telesio e la Cultura Napoletana*, pp. 331-372; Luigi de Franco, *Bernardino Telesio. La Vita e l'Opera* (Cosenza: Edizioni Periferia, 1989); Guido Giglioni, 'The First of the Moderns or the Last of the Ancients? B.T. on Nature and Sentience', *Bruniana e Campanelliana* 16:1 (2010): pp. 69-87.

<sup>581</sup> See Germana Ernst, *Religione, Ragione e Natura: Ricerche su Tommaso Campanella e il Tardo Rinascimento* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1991); idem, *Tommaso Campanella: il Libro e il Corpo della Natura* (Bari: Laterza, 2002); John M. Headley, *Tommaso Campanella and the Transformation of the World* (Cambridge, MA: Princeton University Press, 1997); D. P. Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic from Ficino to Campanella* (London: Warburg Institute, 1958).

<sup>582</sup> Reghini, 'Imperialismo Pagano', p. 82: 'che sta lentamente disinfectando dal cristianesimo la mentalità europea. Questi mistici sensisti, questi precursori ed iniziatori della filosofia europea, non erano dei santi poltroni che si ritirassero in una Tebaide od in un eremo; erano degli uomini d'azione battaglieri e coraggiosi'.

After the brief reference to these three ecclesiastical figures, it is the turn of one of the embodiments of imperialism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries politics: Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821). Reghini considers him as ‘another Italian’, since his birthplace, Ajaccio, Corsica, in ancient times had been part of the Italian province of the Roman Empire.<sup>583</sup> In the brief number of lines devoted to Napoleon, the reader can glean the great respect, almost a veneration, that the Florentine author had for the Corsican leader:

The Roman eagle flew high once again with the Napoleonic legions, and Italy found freedom again even in provinces that today are oppressed, the Latin spirit triumphed and Rome had a King once more. And it was the imperial idea, Roman, pagan notwithstanding the Concordat [with the Vatican], which between the fire of revolution reconstituted after many centuries Italy’s unity.<sup>584</sup>

To the modern reader, the use of Napoleon as a figure that could be venerated by Roman Traditionalists may seem strange, given Napoleon’s nationality, his nationalistic aims of expansion and his alliance with the Holy See. Nevertheless, the fact that an Emperor had finally reunited the peninsula under one rule was a fact so exceptional, that Reghini and his friends, and other politicians responsible for the independence and final unity of Italy during the *Risorgimento* were more than happy not to throw the baby out with the bath water, and to vigorously hold onto both.

Giuseppe Mazzini and Giuseppe Garibaldi are thus mentioned as the incarnation of imperialist ideas in Italy. Reghini really wanted to make sure that his writing would celebrate these two figures as pagan, or at least lay, imperialists.<sup>585</sup> About Mazzini, whom Reghini does not hesitate to call a ‘seer’, Reghini writes, ‘He too, like Virgil and Dante, who loved, studied and understood more than many illustrious professors, said that Italy was destined by God to dominate over the populations, to give to the world

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<sup>583</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83 ‘un altro italiano’.

<sup>584</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83: ‘L’aquila romana levava dunque nuovamente altissimo il volo colle legioni napoleoniche, tornava l’Italia a libertà anche in provincie oggi soggette, la latinità trionfava e Roma aveva di nuovo un Re. Ed era l’idea imperiale romana, pagana non ostante l’errore del Concordato, che di tra l’incendio della rivoluzione ricostituiva dopo tanti secoli l’unità d’Italia’.

<sup>585</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 83-4.

from Rome, the light of a third civilization'.<sup>586</sup> The end of the third section brings the reader to the twentieth-century, where Reghini states that '[m]asonic democracy today dreams of a confederate republic of Latin countries headed, it is obvious, by France, with the fated city of Bern as a capital, just to make the internationalist yokels happy'.<sup>587</sup>

In the brief half page, afterword, in which Reghini sums up the major points of his writing, in order for them to stick in the mind of the reader: firstly, choosing Catholic Nationalism is equal to distancing oneself from a three-thousand year-old tradition of heathen imperialism, preferring an exotic creed like Christianity to the autochthone Italian tradition; secondly, none of the parties who vied for attention and votes before the First World War possessed the pagan character sought by Reghini: '[b]ut the attempt is wrong; because the momentary conditions of the parties are unimportant in front of the age-old and fatal revolutions of the spirits';<sup>588</sup> the afterword ends with an final admonition to the Catholic nationalists:

[T]he others may do what they want. We know they cannot win. What reassures us is our faith in the destiny of the Eternal City, and we remind and will remind to the overt and hidden enemies of heathen imperialism the Latin maxim: Destiny leads on those who are willing to follow, and drags along those who don't.<sup>589</sup>

The importance of *Imperialismo Pagano* to the political aims of the *Schola* has been sorely neglected, and this is the first thorough analysis of the text. Its importance to members of the *Schola* itself is undeniable: it was the only article that Reghini deemed

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<sup>586</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 83-4: 'Anche egli, come Virgilio e come Dante, che amò, studiò e comprese più di tanti illustri professori, diceva essere l'Italia destinata da Dio a dominare sopra le genti, a dare al mondo da Roma la luce di una terza civiltà'.

<sup>587</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84: 'la democrazia massonica sogna oggi una confederazione delle repubbliche latine, capeggiata si capisce dalla Francia, con la fatidica città di Berna per capitale, tanto per contentare i buzzurri internazionalisti'.

<sup>588</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85: 'Ma il tentativo è politicamente sbagliato; perché le condizioni momentanee dei partiti non hanno importanza di fronte alle secolari e fatali rivoluzioni degli spiriti'.

<sup>589</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85 'Gli altri facciano quello che vogliono. Sappiamo che non possono vincere. Ce lo assicura la nostra fede nel destino della Città Eterna, ed ai nemici palesi e nascosti dell'imperialismo pagano ricordiamo e ricorderemo la sentenza latina: Ducunt volentes fata, nolentes trahunt'.

worthy of republishing, in his own journal *Atanor* (1924). What permeates *Imperialismo* is no clear-cut political strategy. It is not a manifesto for the creation of a party. I see it more as an attempt to take stock of the situation within the Roman Traditional milieu written the year before the Great War, with World War I in mind: a rallying point before the years 1915-1918 for the Guénonian *elite intellectuelle*, which Armentano and Reghini firmly believed to represent.<sup>590</sup> The great representatives of the past are celebrated one by one, almost creating a pantheon which to take inspiration from, and an odd pantheon at that: one where Giuseppe Mazzini, Giordano Bruno and Napoleon were made to belong to the same tradition of heathen imperialists, who had, in one way or another, held the greatness of Italy in great esteem, and loathed the backward thinking of the Church and its temporal power. The reprint of the article in 1924, as we shall see in the next chapter, is also significant. Mussolini had taken power and installed himself as the Dux, the leader, of the Italian people, and discourses about the birth of a Third Rome, which had circulated in the small Roman Traditionalist milieu now hit the headlines of most newspapers and were the subject of discussion among the most celebrated Italian intellectuals. *Imperialismo Pagano*, in 1924 more than in 1914, would represent a great tool for Reghini and others to become acquainted with Mussolini, and, in the following years, practice magic with the aim of helping him succeed in his expansionistic endeavors.

*Imperialismo Pagano*, on a smaller scale, also helped pinpoint the *Schola Italica* in the Italian occult milieu: in the comparatively small environment, occultist would oftentimes be members of various orders at the same time: Reghini himself had, the past, been a member of the Theosophical Society and of Freemasonry. The *Schola* brought in an element of elitism which had previously been unheard of: it could be joined by invitation only, it distanced itself from all other occult manifestations, claiming to be the only Italic valid way to reach certain goals and some of its members were all too happy to disregard Theosophists, Anthroposophists, Freemasons and other occultists, labeling them as charlatans. *Imperialismo* more than any of Reghini's writings, showcased the existence of a small but vocal, elitist, right-wing, Traditionalist occult presence in Italy. In a subculture where Christianity still represented the superstructure against which occult theories were formulated,

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*Imperialismo* shocked and was condemned by the bourgeois occultist, who, at least in Italy, always tried to conjugate religion and occultism. It represented a novel way of interaction between politics, occult activism and cultural Traditionalism which make Reghini and his small coterie of friends stand out from the more mainstream expressions of the occult even to this date.

#### 4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The chapter started with an analysis of the nationalist and irredentist currents in Italy at the beginning of the war. This was a necessary step in order to fulfill two precise hypotheses I wanted to demonstrate: firstly, that, even though the nationalist idea had spread to the most varied political milieus, Reghini still felt that most of these undercurrents were still undermined by the greatest threat Italy was facing at the time, namely the interference of the Catholic church within the political life of the country; secondly, that irredentist feelings were rife in the years preceding the Great War, and Reghini and the other members of the *Schola*, therefore, saw the conquest of the northeastern Italophone lands under Austrian rule as the main reason to join the war in the first place: although for many Masons and irredentist sympathisers the reasons behind their will to go to war were against Austria were preeminently political, the *Schola* as a whole felt it had a more sacred mission: that of reuniting the peninsula under one people, one nation-state, one language and one culture, which, according to them, harkened back to two-thousand years previously.

‘Imperialismo Pagano’, then, can be read as the lucid and intriguing expression of all of these sentiments: the political, the occult, and in some cases even the spiritual/religious feelings found within Roman Traditionalists. As stated earlier, ‘Imperialismo Pagano’ certainly did not seek to convert the masses to an old religion and to Pagan ideals: what it sought to do was to reach those Masons, who could understand, appreciate and embrace the message, and ultimately join Reghini and Armentano in the formation of an intellectual elite. Such an elite was seen as a necessary factor behind the national regeneration Reghini was seeking, as the very first lines and their comment on the masses and their ability to vote make extremely clear.

‘Imperialismo Pagano’ is Reghini at his most antimodern, antidemocratic and anticlerical, with something to say to the nationalists and Freemasons too. It was an all-out attack on a large part of society, and as such, it did not seek to convert many, but to stir something in the hearts and minds of the chosen few.



## CHAPTER 6:

### FASCISM AND TRADITIONALISM, MODERNITY AND ANTIMODERNITY (1920-1925)

‘After the Rome of the Caesars, that of the Popes, there exists today a Rome, the Fascist one, which, with the concurrency of the ancient and the modern imposes itself to the admiration of the world’.<sup>591</sup>

Benito Mussolini

#### 1. SCOPE OF THE CHAPTER

The scope of this chapter includes fundamental years both in the history of the country, with the rise of Fascism, and in Reghini’s spiritual and political development: the 1920s may be considered as the most prolific decade for the Florentine thinker, a decade which would see him as editor of three Traditionalist journals and author of one book on Freemasonry and translator of several foreign titles.<sup>592</sup> The years spanning from 1920 to 1925 evidenced the first frictions between the rising new political class in Italy and the Roman Traditionalists who at first saw in Benito Mussolini (1883-1945) the possibility accomplishing the formation of the

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<sup>591</sup> ‘Dopo la Roma dei Cesari, quella dei Papi, c’è oggi una Roma, quella fascista, la quale con la simultaneità dell’antico e il moderno si impone all’ammirazione del mondo’, quoted in Francesco Nitti, *La Disgregazione dell’Europa, Saggio su Alcune Verità Impopolari*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Rome: Faro, 1946), p. 14.

<sup>592</sup> For foreign books, see his translations of Robert L. Stevenson, *Lo Strano Caso del Dottor Jekyll e del Signor Hyde* (Rome: Voghera, 1923); René Guénon, ‘L’Esoterismo di Dante’, *Atanòr* 1:4 (1924), pp. 103-116; *Ibid.*, 1:5 (1924), pp. 140-5; *Ibid.*, 1:7 (1924), pp. 193-201; *Ibid.*, 1:8-9, pp. 252-267; Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa, *De Occulta*, intro. and trans. by Arturo Reghini.

political and intellectual elite that they had envisaged as a harbinger of a Roman spirituality, which would make Italy great once more.

In order to provide the reader with a gradual and clear approach to the subject at hand, the chapter will be divided into five main sections, the first of which is this brief introduction. The second section will be devoted to the Fascist phenomenon: after a short historical narration of the socio-political environment from 1920 to 1922, the March on Rome of 28 October 1922, which initiated the chain of events that were to bring Mussolini to power, will be discussed at some length to provide a solid historical background, against which I shall frame the other sections that will be included in the chapter. A strong focus shall be given to the modern *and* antimodern aspects of Fascism, mainly utilising and harmonising the apparently opposing theories of Frank Kermode and Roger Griffin, who attributed to Fascism, respectively an innate sense of an ending and the sense of a new beginning of an era.<sup>593</sup> As with Roman Traditionalist ideas, in which both perceptions of Modernity as an omen of an end and contemporarily of a new beginning are considered, I will argue that Fascism reflects the same modern/antimodern characteristics as Traditionalism, and therefore provided Arturo Reghini, Amedeo Armentano and others with high hopes for the future.

The third section will be devoted to the relationship between Fascism and Occultism: articles and books have been devoted to the topic, the majority in Italian, most of them effectively disproving any major connection between Mussolini and his coterie and occultist circles.<sup>594</sup> My aim here will be that of assessing the state of the research so far on this interesting intersection, while providing some personal thoughts on the subject at hand. Bigger occultist milieus, such as Freemasonry, Theosophy and Anthroposophy will be scrutinised, and a concluding socio-historical reflection on the 1925 Bodrero bill, which in effect banned secret societies in Italy,

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<sup>593</sup> See Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967) and Roger Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism: The Sense of a Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler* (London: Palgrave, 2007).

<sup>594</sup> See the already mentioned *Esoterismo e Fascismo*, ed. by Gianfranco de Turrís; Giorgio Galli, *La Politica e i Maghi* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1995); idem, *La magia e il potere. L'esoterismo nella politica occidentale* (Turin: Lindau, 2004).

will conclude the section dedicated to the wider interactions between Fascism and Occultism.

The fourth section will be devoted to the birth of what has been called the Traditionalist school, or, alternatively, Guenonian Traditionalism: great attention will be granted to the historical development of the main ideas concerning Traditionalist thought and that of French thinker René Guénon: new evidence, positing the French thinker's conversion to Islam almost ten years prior to the date usually proposed, will be taken into account, and the strong ties with Armentano, Giulio Guerrieri (1885-1963), Reghini and, to a lesser extent, Julius Evola will be considered in what I will strive to prove to be a prolific crosspollination of ideas between the philosopher of Blois and the Italian Traditionalists.<sup>595</sup> An unpublished correspondence between Reghini and Guénon will be analysed to shed more light on this collaboration, which up to now has been sorely neglected by Guénon scholars and non-Italian Traditionalist scholars. By utilising this hitherto unpublished data, I will argue that the early history of Traditionalism of the 1910s and 1920s should be partially amended and updated. It will become apparent how Roman Traditionalism and Guenonian Traditional, for a brief, yet crucial time, proceeded hand in hand, conscious of their differences, but even more attentive to the similarities in thought which the two small elite think-tanks had in the early part of the twentieth century.

The fifth and final section of the chapter will narrow the focus down to the Roman Traditionalists themselves and their struggle for the survival of their core ideals under the new socio-political circumstances, which after 1922 would change the social and intellectual face of the Italian cultural milieu. A comparison will be made between the relative freedom experienced by the *Schola* members in publicizing and pushing forth their agenda, and the early difficulties encountered after the March on Rome and Mussolini's coup. This final section will then reach its conclusion with a historical analysis of the Bodrero bill of 1925, which essentially outlawed Freemasonry and any other kind of secret society, an early manifestation of the adversities that the *Schola* would have to face in the following years of consolidation of the Fascist regime. With the ransacking of lodges by the Fascist *squadristi*

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<sup>595</sup> For this section I will be making use of published and unpublished letters between Guénon and Reghini.

(Mussolini's armed hand, grouped in Fascist squads), many occultists faced voluntary exile, including Amedeo Armentano in 1924 and Leone Caetani (1869-1935), the Duke of Sermoneta and an eminent Orientalist, who was allegedly very close to certain occultist circles in the capital.<sup>596</sup>

The chapter will conclude with a brief summary of all the points discussed above, and will aim to highlight two main points: firstly, through the idea of social occult modernism, I will be able to liken the Fascist revolution to the *Schola Italica*, insofar as they are both an antimodern product of modernity: this similarity is possibly what brought many Roman Traditionalist to put their trust into the new, up and coming regime, which seemed to share so many ideas with the *Schola* itself: through Kermodé's and Griffin's theories on Fascism, I will be able to locate the Roman Traditionalist movement in a clearer framework and to highlight how antimodern sentiments, a by-product of modern sensibility, were common in Italy, on a social, political and intellectual level. The *Schola*, I will argue, was not an isolated exception but part of a more widespread worldview, which was common to other occultist and intellectual circuits: in this sense, a comparison with Guénon's ideas of elitism will be enlightening; the second aspect will be the importance the Italian Traditionalists had in divulging their writings and those of René Guénon, before the Traditionalist school even had a chance to blossom in France. Far from being an isolated Italian phenomenon, Roman Traditionalism, as I will argue, most likely had its fair share of influence on the ideas that Guénon would later commit to paper in his highly influential publications. It is possible, in my opinion, to map a very specific network of antimodern thinkers, who carried the occult discourse in ways that shunned the concepts of progressivism, scientism and secularization, which previous scholars have attached to it.

## 2. THE LARGER PICTURE: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

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<sup>596</sup> For more on Leone Caetani, see *Giornata di Studio nel Cinquantenario della Morte di Leone Caetani*, ed. by Francesco Gabrieli (Rome: Fondazione Leone Caetani dell'Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 1985); del Ponte, *Il Movimento Tradizionalista*; Giudice, 'Pagan Rome'; N. R. Caesar Augustus, 'NON CONFUNDITUR - Ovvero se debba avere fine la polemica sull'identità di N.R. Ottaviano con Leone Caetani', *Elixir 2* (Viareggio: Rebis, 2006): pp. 27-90.

## 2.1. BENITO MUSSOLINI AND THE MARCH ON ROME

On 28 October 1922, tens of thousand of Fascist militants belonging to the *Partito Nazionale Fascista* (National Fascist Party), converged upon Rome, in order to force the then king Victor Emmanuel III (1869-1947) to dissolve Parliament and grant their leader Benito Mussolini a chance to create a new government.<sup>597</sup> The events that took place between 27 and 30 October 1922 would in the future be considered as the prologue of the Fascist revolution, and the 28 October would, under the Fascist regime, mark the beginning of the Fascist year. A brief excursus on the figure of Benito Mussolini is now necessary, in order to better understand the historical events that were to shape Italy in the 1920s and the fascination on behalf of intellectuals such as Reghini, Giovanni Amendola and Giuseppe Prezzolini, who all, at some stage, believed in the possibility of a new beginning for Italy, under Mussolini's new leadership.<sup>598</sup>

Benito Amilcare Andrea Mussolini was born in 1883 in Dovia di Predappio, son of a Socialist blacksmith and a Catholic elementary school teacher. Mussolini shared his father's passion for politics, and in 1900 he officially registered with the *Partito Socialista Italiano* (Italian Socialist Party), which, as we have seen in the previous chapter, would play a vital role in the first twenty years of Italian politics.<sup>599</sup> Due to the inability to find a full-time job as a schoolteacher, and to avoid conscription into the Italian military service, Mussolini decided to relocate to Lausanne, Switzerland on 9 July 1902, where he soon became head of the local Worker's Union, as well as penning his first articles for local newspapers. While in Lausanne, Mussolini was able to attend the lectures of Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923), professor in economics and political sciences. The two soon bonded and Mussolini was intrigued by Pareto's theories on elites and on the redistribution of wealth. Back

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<sup>597</sup> See Giulia Albanese, *La marcia su Roma* (Bari: Laterza, 2006); Gianpasquale Santomassimo, *La marcia su Roma* (Florence: Giunti, 2000); Gian Franco Vené, *Il Golpe Fascista del 1922. Cronaca e Storia della Marcia su Roma* (Rome: Garzanti, 1975).

<sup>598</sup> Reghini's stance towards Mussolini was complex and ever-changing: see Marco Rossi, 'L'Interventismo Politico-Culturale', quoted in de Luca, *Reghini*, p. 76: 'Reghini was far from the ideas of Palazzo Giustiniani because of his Fascist sympathies and for his personal antidemocratic convictions [...] but at the same time, he didn't agree with Mussolini's tactic of finding an agreement with the catholic church'.

<sup>599</sup> See especially Emilio Gentile and Spencer di Scala, *Mussolini Socialista* (Bari: Laterza, 2015) and Renzo de Felice, *Mussolini Il Rivoluzionario 1883-1920* (Turin: Einaudi, 2005).

in Italy after the interruption of the limitation period of his crime of avoiding the draft, Mussolini, in 1910, became secretary of the *Federazione Socialista Forlivese* (The Forlì Socialist Federation), and became editor of his first, weekly paper: *L'Idea Socialista* (The Socialist Idea).<sup>600</sup> In 1912 he became editor of the main Socialist paper of the time, the *Avanti!* (Forward!), and in 1913 he ran for the elections discussed in the previous chapter, but was defeated by his Republican opponent Giuseppe Gaudenzi (1872-1936).<sup>601</sup> With the beginning of World War One, Mussolini changed his Socialist views on neutrality in the conflict: on 18 October he published a third-page article entitled 'Dalla Neutralità Assoluta alla Neutralità Attiva e Operante' ('From Absolute Neutrality to Active and Operating Neutrality').<sup>602</sup> The article argued for voting in favour of a war among nations, which would have brought the Italian people to be armed and successively transform the arming of the people for war purposes to an armed revolution against the eternal enemy: bourgeoisie:

That democracy would therefore have the faculty to declare war, may the will of the people be ignored (and in case of resistance, may they bring violence with the 'under-siege' status) is understood: the will of the people, if consulted, would very rarely coincide with that of kings, but that Socialists accept the system of bourgeois governments, is absurd. That's why the mass needed to be consulted, not least so that the Government could have a clear indication of the feelings of a great part of public opinion.<sup>603</sup>

The article had devastating effects on Mussolini's Socialist career. On 29 November of the same year he was expelled from the Socialist Party, but he had managed, with the financing of important industrial sectors, to found his own paper, *Il Popolo d'Italia*

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<sup>600</sup> Mussolini himself rebaptised the paper *Lotta di Classe* (Class Struggle).

<sup>601</sup> On Gaudenzi, see Ugo dal Pozzo, *Giuseppe Gaudenzi e il Suo Secolo* (Forlì: P.R.I., 1972); *I fratelli Giuseppe e Quinto Gaudenzi e Pievequinta*, ed. by Mauro Mariani (Forlì: Associazione Amici della Pieve, 2000).

<sup>602</sup> Benito Mussolini, 'Dalla Assoluta Neutralità alla Neutralità Attiva', *Avanti!* 18 October 1914, p. 3.

<sup>603</sup> Mussolini, 'Dalla Assoluta Neutralità' p. 3: 'Democrazia sarebbe dunque facoltà di dichiarare la guerra - ignorino la volontà dei popoli (e in caso di resistenza la violentino con lo stato d'assedio) si capisce: la volontà dei popoli se consultata coinciderebbe assai raramente con quella dei re, ma che i socialisti accettino i sistemi dei governi borghesi, è assurdo. Ecco perchè bisognava consultare la massa, anche perchè il Governo avesse una chiara indicazione sullo stato d'animo di gran parte dell'opinione pubblica'.

(The Italian People), from which he harshly criticised his ex-colleagues. In 1915 he was present at the foundation of the extraparliamentary political group *Fasci di Azione Rivoluzionaria* (Fascies of Revolutionary Action), led by unionist Filippo Corridoni, with whom Mussolini shared the hatred of the Parliament and bourgeois State institutions. In a speech dated 15 May 1915, his authoritarian drift was already becoming apparent:

As for myself, I am always more firmly convinced that for the safety of Italy a few dozen members of Parliament should be shot, and I mean shot, in the back, and some ex-ministers at least should be sent into exile. Not only this, but I believe with ever increasing faith, that the Parliament in Italy is a contagious wart. It needs to be extirpated.<sup>604</sup>

Back in Milan after the war, where he had distinguished himself for acts of valour,<sup>605</sup> Mussolini was ready to create the Italian answer to the German *Freikorps*: in *Piazza San Sepolcro* (Holy Sepulchre Piazza), on 23 March 1919, Mussolini gave a speech before the first 50 adherents to the *Fasci Italiani di Combattimento* (Italian Fighting Fascies).<sup>606</sup> After another speech, held on the 15 April, a mob of *Fasci* assaulted the headquarters of the Socialist *Avanti!*, while Mussolini stocked the newsroom of his *Popolo d'Italia* with weapons, fearing retaliation from comprehensibly disgruntled Socialists.<sup>607</sup>

On 16 November of the same year, the *Fasci di Combattimento* chose to run on their own in the elections, with the biggest names, such as Mussolini and Marinetti,

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<sup>604</sup> *Storia del Fascismo*, ed. by Enzo Biagi, 3 Vols. (Florence: Sadea-Della Volpe, 1964), pp. 374-5: 'Quanto a me, sono sempre più fermamente convinto che per la salute dell'Italia bisognerebbe fucilare, dico fucilare, nella schiena, qualche dozzina di deputati, e mandare all'ergastolo un paio almeno di ex ministri. Non solo, ma io credo con fede sempre più profonda, che il Parlamento in Italia sia un bubbone pestifero. Occorre estirparlo'.

<sup>605</sup> See Mussolini's war diaries spanning from 1915 to 1917 in *Giornale di Guerra*, ed. by Alessandro Campi (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2015).

<sup>606</sup> Giorgio Rumi, 'Mussolini e il "programma" di San Sepolcro', *Il movimento di Liberazione in Italia* (1963), pp. 3-26; Roberto Vivarelli, *Storia delle Origini del Fascismo- Dalla Grande Guerra alla Marcia su Roma* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1991), p. 365-6; Anonymous [Benito Mussolini], 'Programma di San Sepolcro', *Il Popolo d'Italia* 6 June 1919, pp. 2-4.

<sup>607</sup> See Giordano Bruno Guerri, *Fascisti* (Milan: Mondadori, 1995), p. 70; Mimmo Franzinelli, *Squadristi: Protagonisti e Tecniche della Violenza Fascista 1919-1922* (Milan: Mondadori, 2003), pp. 279-280.

focused on gaining votes in Milan. The result was a fiasco, and no seat in Parliament was won, the party gaining a measly 4675 votes in the Milan constituency.<sup>608</sup> Realizing the failure to make an impression on the left-wing electorate, Mussolini subsequently sought alliances with more conservative powers: in the following elections of 1921, he struck an alliance with the anti-Socialist giant in Italian politics, the Liberal Giovanni Giolitti (1892-1927), who had served as the prime minister of Italy five times between 1892 and 1921. Giolitti had convinced Mussolini to join the *Blocchi Nazionali* (National Blocks), a political group formed by Liberals, Nationalist and minor parties.<sup>609</sup> the result was a triumph for the Fascists, if compared to the disastrous campaign conducted just two years previously: the Blocks obtained 105 seats in parliament, and Mussolini's party gained 35 of those.<sup>610</sup> The elections were undertaken in a violent climate, and many times, possibly with the connivance of the Police, Mussolini's *squadristi* were able to interrupt political rallies of opposing parties with the use of violence.<sup>611</sup> At the end of 1919, Mussolini transformed his *Fasci di Combattimento* into a more democratic sounding *Partito Nazionale Fascista*, and on New Year's Day of 1922 he founded the party's official newspaper, *Gerarchia* (Hierarchy). In February, Luigi Facta (1861-1930), a modest follower of Giolitti's political ideas, was elected prime minister, while in August, the Socialists and Communists organised a strike against the increasing violence of Mussolini's *squadristi* against rival political factions.<sup>612</sup> It is my opinion that this was the exact moment that the political climate in Italy degenerated, since Mussolini was probably only waiting for such disorders to happen, in order to exercise a firmer grip on domestic policy.<sup>613</sup> At the beginning of September the *squadristi* illegally and violently occupied the town halls of several cities, including Milan, Genoa, Leghorn

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<sup>608</sup> Ministero per l'Industria, il Commercio ed il Lavoro, Ufficio Centrale di Statistica, *Statistica delle Elezioni Generali Politiche per la XXV Legislatura. (16 Novembre 1919)* (Roma: Stabilimento Poligrafico per l'Amministrazione della Guerra, 1920).

<sup>609</sup> idem, *Statistica delle Elezioni Generali Politiche per la XXVI Legislatura. (15 Maggio 1919)* (Roma: Stabilimento Poligrafico per l'Amministrazione della Guerra, 1920).

<sup>610</sup> On a total, the Blocchi received 19.1% of the votes, arriving behind only to the Socialist Party and the Liberal Party.

<sup>611</sup> See Angelo d'Orsi, *La rivoluzione antibolscevica* (Milan: Franco Angeli 1985): the rise in Fascist violence was justified by the Squadristi as a form of repression of alleged Bolshevik uprisings.

<sup>612</sup> See Renzo de Felice, *Benito Mussolini – La Conquista del Potere (1921-1925)* (Turin: Einaudi, 2002), p. 273.

<sup>613</sup> The rally in Naples has been called the dress rehearsal of the March on Rome. Mussolini held two speeches in one day: one at the *San Carlo* theatre, for the bourgeoisie, and a more conventional one for his followers, in the bigger *Piazza San Carlo*.



and Trento: it was the beginning of what would subsequently be called *La Rivoluzione Fascista* (The Fascist Revolution). The last step before a affirmative action against the democratic institutions of the State was a sizeable rally held in Naples on 24 October 1922, just four days prior to the most important date in Fascist history: there, Mussolini urged for his supporters to march towards Rome and to seize the power that, in his words, was rightfully theirs.

In a secret meeting with Giolitti, on 23 October, in Turin's Hotel Bologne, the Popular Party representative Giovanni Battista Bertone (1874-1967) had tried to convince the ex-prime minister to take his post once more, in the wake of Facta's objective inability to contain the Fascist revolution. During the Naples rally, Mussolini is alleged to have said to the masses of followers that 'either they will give us the government, or we will take it marching down on Rome'. Thus, on the night between the 27<sup>th</sup> and the 28<sup>th</sup> of October, almost 25,000 men headed towards Rome from many different locations, confiscating and appropriating themselves of trains and of the railway lines. On the morning of 28 October, Mussolini got in touch with Antonio Salandra (1853-1931), right-wing politician and, later, a distinguished member of the Fascist intelligentsia and professor at the University of Rome: while Salandra had urged veteran politician Vittorio Emanuele Orlando (1860-1952), ex prime minister in the years 1916-1919, to form a new government, King Vittorio Emanuele III suggested that Mussolini create a new group of ministers under the supervision of Salandra himself, whom he knew Mussolini admired. Mussolini refused the idea of a joint rulership, and urged the king to send him a telegram, 'black on white', in which he would be granted the possibility to govern on his own. Mussolini only met Vittorio Emanuele III on 4 November, his trip from Milan to Rome being interrupted at almost every station by sympathisers and militants belonging to his *squadre*: once in Rome, a total of 70,000 men marched in front of Mussolini and Vittorio Emanuele III, the numbers of activists having doubled in merely a week. Later that day, Mussolini promised he would create a government composed of Fascist and non-Fascist elements, although his antipathy for the Socialist and the newly created Communist party would remain evident, for all to see. Thus, with political intrigue, intimidation and violence, Mussolini had become prime minister of Italy.

## 2.2. FASCISM AND ROMAN TRADITIONALISM: ANTIMODERN OR MODERN?

In his ground-breaking work, *Modernism and Fascism: A Sense of a New Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler* (2006), Professor Roger Griffin declares the very concepts of Modernism and Fascism to be ‘antithetical and oxymoronic’, when dealt with in the two major incarnations of Fascist theories of the first part of the twentieth century.<sup>614</sup> His work, which I will refer to frequently in this subsection, posits great emphasis on ‘modernist Fascism’ and the sense of a new beginning that the Fascist Regimes of Italy and Germany provided to their populace. The work is a counter-argument of sorts to the theories presented in Professor Frank Kermode in his *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theories of Fiction* (1966): in his collection of essays, literary critic Kermode had focused more on the idea of crisis and on the concept of apocalyptic time as a central theme to modernist literature, ascribing any foray of modernist poets into the realm of politics as a dangerous fall into the noxious world of the irrational: no doubt perturbed and influenced by the writings of members of the Frankfurt School, Kermode wrote when tackling the issue of the poetical treatment of concepts of crisis and transition at the turn of the twentieth century: ‘[i]t’s ideological expression is Fascism; its practical consequence the Final Solution’.<sup>615</sup> While oftentimes Kermode’s conclusions seem to be heavily influenced by texts such as *The Authoritarian Personality* (1950), famous for its inclusion of an F-Scale (Fascist Scale) to measure a person’s inclination towards irrational and Fascist ideas, I still think his work is of paramount importance, when paired with Griffin’s, if we want to analyse the Fascist phenomenon, and, on a smaller scale, Roman Traditionalism and their links to modernity and anti-modernity.<sup>616</sup> In his lecture ‘Apocalyptic Modernity’, Kermode tackles the subject of modernist poets coming to grips with aspects of contemporary reality:<sup>617</sup> to do so, he employs the oft-cited poem *Second Coming* (1919), by poet William Butler Yeats (1865-1939):<sup>618</sup> the composition is usually used

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<sup>614</sup> Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism*, p. 1.

<sup>615</sup> Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending*, p. 103

<sup>616</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, Else Frenkel Brunswik, Daniel Levinson and Nevitt Sanford, *The Authoritarian Personality* (New York: Harper, 1950): the discussion on the F-Scale may be found in chapters VII, ‘The Measurement of Implicit Antidemocratic Trends’, pp. 222-278.

<sup>617</sup> Frank Kermode, ‘Apocalyptic Modernity’ in *The Sense of an Ending*, pp. 93-124.

<sup>618</sup> William Butler Yeats, ‘Second Coming’, in *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats* (London: Macmillan, 1982), p. 211.

to signify the disaggregation of values and certainties that the modern world forces upon man, and it is worth quoting the first stanza.

Turning and turning in the widening gyre  
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;  
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,  
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere  
The ceremony of innocence is drowned.<sup>619</sup>

To Kermode, there are two ways of articulating one's feelings towards the crisis one is living through: 'he stresses the difference between poetic *fictions* used by the artists to illuminate or articulate elusive aspects of contemporary reality, and politicized *myths*, which become incorporated into the ideological rationale for attempts to engineer radical transformations of that reality'.<sup>620</sup> Yeats' enthusiasm for Italian Fascism and the Irish variant of the Blue Shirts is a testament to his passage to his ideological and political dimension, which Kermode dismisses as a slipping over into 'the invisible border into the realm of the political'.<sup>621</sup> While acknowledging the forty-year difference between the publication of the respective groups, Griffin argues that Fascism cannot be understood without taking into account the crisis of positivism, secularization, and all the aspects which we have grown accustomed to associate with early-twentieth-century Western culture; at the same time, though, he denies the hegemonic feeling of crisis or despair put forth by Kermode, and postulates that

In the immediate aftermath of the First World War not just the avant-garde, but millions of 'ordinary people' felt they were witnessing the birth pangs of a new world under an ideological and political regime whose nature was yet to be decided.<sup>622</sup>

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<sup>619</sup> Yeats, 'Second Coming', p. 211, vv. 1-6.

<sup>620</sup> Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism*, p. 7.

<sup>621</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>622</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

Griffin's definition of modernism, which, as we shall note, can be seen to include even seemingly anti-modern movements such as Fascism and Roman Traditionalism, appears to be threefold: firstly, it necessarily needs a view of the process of modernization as one that is constantly eroding 'a stable sense of "tradition" and promotes the rise of "reflexivity"';<sup>623</sup> secondly it identifies modernity with a shift in the conception of time, which becomes itself more reflexive and open to the possibility of a new and better future; thirdly it characterises modernity of the mid to late nineteenth century as a period of loss of interest in the trope of progress, favouring that of decadence, to which Yeats's *Second Coming* tellingly alludes. Griffin, on the backdrop of his analysis of Fascism, also gives a definition of the concept of tradition, which serves the reader in order for him to understand Roman Traditionalism in modern times: '[t]radition [...] is to be considered not as a static, timeless entity but as a dynamically evolving, in some cases historically recent, set of beliefs and practices'.<sup>624</sup> Such a myth is constructed precisely by people such as Reghini and Armentano, who 'feel thrown into an age of chaos of decline', where the perceived view of stability and security appears to be threatened by the tropes of modernity to which we have grown accustomed: the rise of rationalism, secularization, liberalism, capitalism, the idea of progress, and so on.<sup>625</sup>

The idea of antimodern movements existing in modern times and even being a direct product of modernity is, therefore, not an outrageous or illegitimate idea to entertain. It is my idea that both the agents of Roman Traditionalism and the early Fascist regime shared this ambivalent quality, that of thrusting themselves against the classical facets of modernity, viewing them as decaying and useless for their idea of man: hence the appeal to tradition, hence the longing for a mythical past and the creation of a somewhat mythical present, which are connected by great historical narratives in order to be validated. As Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane have written,

Modernism was in most countries [and certainly in Italy] an extraordinary compound of the futuristic and the nihilistic, the revolutionary and the

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<sup>623</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>624</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

<sup>625</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

conservative, the naturalistic and the symbolistic, the romantics and the classical. It was a celebration of a technological age and condemnation of it; an excited acceptance of the belief that old regimes of culture were over, and a deep despair in the face of that fear.<sup>626</sup>

What Fascism and Roman Traditionalism did not incarnate, in my opinion, was the regression of reason and a death-wish plunge into the realms of the irrational, which Adorno and Max Horkheimer bemoan in their *Dialektik Der Aufklärung* (Dialectic of Enlightenment, 1947). Both Fascism and Roman Traditionalism looked to the future with optimism: the modern present had to be transcended in order to provide a new, more stable future, to the Italian population. Mussolini points to this very important point in many of his speeches and writings. In front of the apocalyptic present, as described by Kermode, Mussolini would wish: ‘make it so that the glories of the past may be surpassed by the glories of the coming age’.<sup>627</sup> During a speech soon after the March on Rome, he argued about Fascism being a revitalising element in the life of modern Italians:

Democracy has taken away ‘style’ to the life of the people. Fascism brings back ‘style’ into the lives of the people: [I mean] a line of conduct; colour, strength, the picturesque; the unexpected; the mystical: to sum up, all that matters in the hearts of the multitudes.<sup>628</sup>

In order to regain this style, this Nietzschean leap against the *taedium vivere*, this Bergsonian *élan vital*, everything has to be tried in order to subdue the contrary tide of modernity. War and violence, if necessary, tend to be seen as acceptable, from artists and politicians alike: as we have seen, the Futurist Filippo Tommaso Marinetti (1876-1944), in the *Manifesto of the Futurist Movement* (1909), auspicated the arrival of a war as the ‘cleanser of the world’; Reghini advocated the use of force in his antidemocratic and anticlerical ‘Imperialismo Pagano’ (1914); Gabriele d’Annunzio

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<sup>626</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>627</sup> Benito Mussolini, *Scritti e Discorsi*, vol. 7 (Milan: Hoepli, 1934), p. 256: ‘Fate che le glorie del passato siano superate dalle glorie dell’avvenire’.

<sup>628</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol, 2, p. 335: ‘La democrazia ha tolto lo “stile” alla vita del popolo. Il fascismo riporta lo «stile» nella vita del popolo: cioè una linea di condotta; cioè il colore, la forza, il pittoresco, l’inaspettato, il mistico; insomma, tutto quello che conta nell’animo delle moltitudini’.

(1863-1938), the warrior-poet had led 3,000 men to the conquest of the irredentist city of Fiume in 1919;<sup>629</sup> to Frank Kermode's great distress English modernist poets seemed to embrace Fascist ideologies: two great examples are Yeats and Ezra Pound (1885-1972), who would go on to work for Mussolini and radio-broadcast tirades against Jews and usury and President Roosevelt (1882-1945).<sup>630</sup>

Finally, another scholar whose work fits neatly with my idea of Roman Traditionalism and Fascism as anti-modern expressions of modernism is Walter Adamson, who seems to endorse Griffin's theories on the subject by characterising the antidemocratic aspects of modernism as 'adversary culture or other modernity that challenged the "modernising forces" of science commerce and industry, usually in the name of some more "spiritual" alternative'.<sup>631</sup> This in turn brought some thinkers of the modern period to adhere wholeheartedly to the recreation of the primordial, of the mythical, of the traditional, in what Adamson has defined 'a messianic mood of frenzy, despair and apocalyptic hope'.<sup>632</sup> The hope, for Reghini and the Roman Traditionalists, but also for Mussolini and his Fascist revolution, was that their actions and ideas would play a 'central role [...] in the creation and organization of a regenerated culture'.<sup>633</sup>

Both early Fascism and Roman Traditionalism employed similar tropes in order to further their agenda, and it is clear how, with the grand narrative of the creation of the Third Rome, Reghini and Armentano would have been fascinated by this movement with which they shared many influences, supporters and ideologies:

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<sup>629</sup> See Mimmo Franzinelli and Paolo Cavassini, *Fiume: l'Ultima Impresa di D'Annunzio* (Milan: Mondadori, 2009); Claudia Salaris, *Alla Festa della Rivoluzione. Artisti e Libertari con D'Annunzio a Fiume* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2002); Renzo de Felice, *D'Annunzio Politico (1918-1928)* (Bari: Laterza, 1978).

<sup>630</sup> For primary sources, see Ezra Pound, *L'America, Roosevelt e le Cause della Guerra Presente* (Venice: Casa Editrice delle Edizioni Popolari, 1944); idem, *Oro et Lavoro: alla Memoria di Aurelio Baisi* (Rapallo: Moderna, 1944); idem, *Lavoro ed Usura* (Milan: All'Insegna del Pesce d'Oro, 1954); for secondary sources see *The Ezra Pound Encyclopedia*, ed. by Demetres Tryphonopoulos and Stephen Adams (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2005); *The Cambridge Companion to Ezra Pound*, ed. by Ira B. Nadel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); James Wilhelm, *Ezra Pound: The Tragic Years 1925-1972* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994).

<sup>631</sup> Quoted in Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism*, p. 200; see Walter Adamson, *Avant-Garde Florence: From Modernism to Fascism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

<sup>632</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 200.

<sup>633</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 200.

both, I hope to have shown, are effective anti-modern manifestations of what Adamson defines as ‘other’ modernity when compared to the definition of modernity we are used to. Both, though, did not follow, in my opinion, Adorno’s and Horkheimer’s theories of a regression of reason into the realms of the nihilistic and irrational. Both movements, though with different aims, sought a new beginning, which would alleviate the perceived noxious elements of modernity and would connect man to his natural space and time on earth, subduing, once and for all, the sense of alienation described and suffered by many. While much has been written about the interaction between the modern and totalitarian regimes, especially in the years immediately following World War Two, I think that it would benefit the reader to indulge more on the concept, developed by Griffin, of a social occult modernism, in order to validate my original claim that Traditionalism, as understood by Reghini, Armentano and Evola, was one facet of the modern world, which, although anti-modern or reactionary in nature, was nevertheless a product of its time.

### 2.3. SOCIAL OCCULT MODERNISM

In his chapter ‘A Primordialist Definition of Modernity’, Griffin tackles the issue of what he defines as ‘the Myth of Transition on Modernity’.<sup>634</sup> taking cue from Kermode’s literary criticism of modernist literature, Griffin singles out two key elements in what Kermode had defined the ‘apocalyptic paradigm’: ‘a deep conviction in decadence and a prophetic confidence of renovation’.<sup>635</sup> Griffin then singles out a particular mode of transition in modern times: the Rite of Passage.<sup>636</sup> The outcome of the rite of passage, according to anthropologist Maurice Bloch, is never ‘seen as a return to the condition left behind in the first stage, but as an aggressive consumption of a vitality which is *different* in origin from that which had originally been lost’.<sup>637</sup> Anthropologist pioneer Arnold van Gennep had divided the process culminating to the rite of passage in three distinct stages, and this division is going to make it easier for me to apply this framework to Fascism and Traditionalism: firstly, there is a stage of

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<sup>634</sup> Griffin, ‘A Primordialist Definition of Modernity’, in idem, *Modernism and Fascism*, p. 100-126.

<sup>635</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 101

<sup>636</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 102-104.

<sup>637</sup> Maurice Bloch, *Prey into Hunter* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 4-5.

separation, in which a group, or a single person, detaches itself from the prevailing social conditions. The elitist, secretive and antidemocratic nature of the *Schola Italica* make this concept absolutely clear when it comes to Reghini and Armentano, and Mussolini leaving the Socialist party in 1914 and founding his own paper and political movement successively; secondly, van Gennep theorises the margin, or the liminal, when the old position has been abandoned, but the new one has not been yet reached:<sup>638</sup> chronologically, in the *Schola's* case, the dates go from the months succeeding the meeting between Armentano and Reghini at the Lucifero lodge in Florence in the last years of the 1910s and the first publication of 'Imperialismo Pagano' in 1914, while Mussolini's liminal stage may run from the creation of the *Fasci di Azione Rivoluzionaria* with Corridoni in 1915 until his rise to power in 1923; finally, the third stage is defined as aggregation or post-liminal, when the participants to the rite of passage acquire and work according to their renewed vision of the world:<sup>639</sup> this period, for the *Schola* stretches from 1914 to 1929, the year of the Lateran Accords between Fascism and the Vatican, while Mussolini's post-liminal stage could be stretched from 1922 to 1945, year of his death and of the end of World War Two.

Anglo-American anthropologist Victor Turner has described this process in a very succinct but precise way:

People who are similar in one characteristic [...] withdraw symbolically, even actually, from the total system, from which they may in various degrees feel themselves 'alienated' to seek the glow of a *communitas*. Through the route of 'social category' they escape the alienating structure of a 'social system' into '*communitas*' or social anti-structure.<sup>640</sup>

Having introduced the concept of rite of passage as a form of revitalization, Griffin briefly, but significantly touches upon the occult, with his theory of occultist social

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<sup>638</sup> Arnold van Gennep, 'The Classification of Rites', in idem, *The Rites of Passage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960 [1909]), pp. 1-15.

<sup>639</sup> *Ibid.*, 'Individual Groups', pp. 26-40.

<sup>640</sup> Quoted in Griffin, *Modernity and Fascism*, p. 105.



modernism, a category that this dissertation will greatly benefit from.<sup>641</sup> In choosing Theosophy as the sample occult movement of choice, Griffin argues that what Theosophy provided to the Western man was ‘a horizon once more framed by myth’.<sup>642</sup> There was, in other words, a sense of transcendence and order, which sought to bring about the revitalized humanity away from the ills of modernity.<sup>643</sup> A facet that Griffin explores very thoroughly is that of a necessity to go back to the primordial sources in order to recreate a future, ‘to go “back to the future”’ in a process that Conservative Revolutionary Möller van den Bruck was to call ‘a reconnection *forwards*’.<sup>644</sup> To the reader of this dissertation, it will be clear that Roman Traditionalism as represented by the *Schola Italica* sought to do just that, seeking for the Perennial Pythagorean Tradition, which would illumine the path to a more ordered future. Mussolini’s extensive references to the myth of the third Rome, the iconography used by his party and regime, also seem to point in the same direction.<sup>645</sup> Griffin therefore concludes, having provided us with a new tool with which to read modernism: ‘it is when occultism serves as the principle vehicle for a regenerating civilization allegedly dying from the poison fruits of progress, that it can be seen as a form of social modernism in its own right’.<sup>646</sup>

Griffin also briefly touches upon the idea of a rightist social modernism: in describing the other side of the coin of modernity, which Jeffrey Alexander has aptly described as ‘the dark side of modernity’, the author very briefly mentions Traditionalism, and its being based on the idea of a *philosophia perennis* (perennial philosophy), starting with Guénon, and picked up by Aldous Huxley (1894-1963) in the interwar period, and by Ananda Coomaraswamy (1877-1947) and Fritjof Schuon (1907-1977). It is a short section, in which Griffin does little more than name-dropping before introducing the figure of Julius Evola, as we have seen in previous chapters, arguably the most controversial of Traditionalists. Guénon and Evola are evoked as being representatives of that very dark side of modernity, which counters Coomaraswamy’s leftist approach to the subject. While Guénon’s work *La Crise du*

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<sup>641</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 132-5.

<sup>642</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 131.

<sup>643</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 131.

<sup>644</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 133.

<sup>645</sup> Martin Clark, *Mussolini: Profiles in Power* (London: Pearson Longman, 2005), p. 139.

<sup>646</sup> Griffin, ‘Modernity, Modernism, and Fascism’, p. 17.

*Monde Moderne* (The Crisis of the Modern World, 1927) is described as condemning materialism and containing ‘a conspicuous component of elitism, anti-liberalism, anti-communism and anti-democracy’,<sup>647</sup> Evola is described as allying himself

[o]vertly to totalitarianism, misogyny, anti-Semitism, racism, imperialism, and bio-politics, and hence became accomplice to the most elitist, uncompromising and terroristic forms of Fascism and Nazism.<sup>648</sup>

To conclude, to Griffin and myself, it appears absolutely natural that some forms of occult expressions could be progressive and fit in with standardised ideas of modernity (and in this I refer the read once more to Marco Pasi’s ‘The Modernity of Occultism’), but that in certain scenarios an occult, anti-modern and rightist way of envisioning the world could blossom and win over adherents. Certainly the *Schola Italica*, growing under the inter-war milieu that led to Fascism is a clear example of such a movement.

### 3. OCCULTISM AND FASCISM: A REAL PARTNERSHIP?

Before moving onto an analysis of the relationship between occult movements and the Fascist regime, it will be helpful to provide the reader with a general introduction to the academic study of another totalitarian regime’s ties with occultism, namely the National Socialist movement in Germany. From the 1960s up to this day, it has been a widespread notion, outside of academic circles, that ‘the Nazis were principally inspired and directed by occult agencies from 1920 to 1945’.<sup>649</sup> The cause of this widespread belief no doubt blossomed in the year 1960, with the publication of Louis Pauwels’ and Jacques Bergier’s *Le Matin Des Magiciens* (The Morning of the Magicians), an allegedly non-fiction exposé of occult influences on historical events, conspiracy theories, what may be defined as proto-ancient astronaut theories, all wrapped in a retelling of a secret history of the world, where facts and fiction were crudely blended to create an overarching narrative, which no doubt helped kick-start

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<sup>647</sup> Griffin, *Modernity and Fascism*, p. 138.

<sup>648</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 138.

<sup>649</sup> Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism*: p. 217.

the budding New Age movement.<sup>650</sup> The entire second section of the book was dedicated to the Third Reich, ‘under the suggestive title “A Few Years in the Absolute Elsewhere”’.<sup>651</sup> In it, small secret societies of little effective influence, such as the *Thule Gesellschaft* (Thule Society), were granted paramount importance in the development of Nazi theories and politics. Other secret coteries, such as the *Vril Gesellschaft* were inspired from fiction and have never existed, but in *Le Matin* they seemed to cover a pivotal role in the years in which the Reich was in power. People who had played a marginal role in Hitler’s life were given almost supernatural status, two glaring examples being Dietrich Eckart (1868-1923) and Professor Karl Haushofer (1869-1946): Eckart’s role, according to the authors, was that of mediating the contacts between Hitler and higher, invisible chiefs who were eager to provide the führer with unlimited powers;<sup>652</sup> the second, who had served as an attaché in Japan and had devoted his studies to oriental cultures, supposedly had urged Hitler to focus on the conquest of the east, rekindling the myth, propagated by many occult authors such as Joseph Saint-Yves d’Alveydre (1842-1909) and Ferdynand Ossendowski (1876-1945), that somewhere, in the Gobi desert or the Tibetan Himalayas, lay the entrance to an underground world inhabited by creatures vastly superior to man for intellect and power.<sup>653</sup> Building upon this hodgepodge of tall stories and fanciful elaborations of truth, other authors had followed the footsteps of Pauwels and Bergier: Dietrich Bronder, in 1964, published his *Bevor Hitler Kam* (Before Hitler Came), in which he picked the topic of the *Thule Gesellschaft* and developed it to unprecedented levels of spuriousness:<sup>654</sup> the membership roster of this tiny Bavarian group, which had been born under the name of *Studiengruppe für Germanisches Altertum* (Study Group for Germanic Antiquity), under Bronder’s penmanship, had been inflated to include almost everyone who would play a role in the future Third Reich: according to Bronder, Ariosophists Guido von List (1848-1919) and Lanz von Liebenfels (1874-1954) rubbed shoulders with Benito Mussolini and Adolf Hitler (1889-1945), Heinrich Himmler (1900-1945) and Rudolf Hess (1894-1987). Academic studies such

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<sup>650</sup> Pauwels and Bergier, *Le Matin*.

<sup>651</sup> Quoted in Goodrick-Clarke, *Occult Roots*, p. 219.

<sup>652</sup> For more on Eckart, see Ralph Engelman, *Dietrich Eckart and the Genesis of Nazism* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Press, 1971).

<sup>653</sup> See Christopher Hale, *Himmler’s Crusade: The Nazi Expedition to Find the Origins of the Aryan Race* (Hoboken, N. J.: John Wiley & Sons, 2003).

<sup>654</sup> Rudolf von Sebottendorf [Adam Glauer], *Bevor Hitler kam: Urkundlich aus der Frühzeit der Nationalsozialistischen Bewegung* (Munich: Deukula-Grassinger, 1933).

as Goodricke-Clarke's have since then proven that Hitler, although living in Munich at the time, never participated in any of the meetings, that Mussolini throughout the 1910s never visited Bavaria, and that the presence of other future members of the Reich was doubtful to say the least.<sup>655</sup>

Other authors followed this extremely lucrative niche market, the most notable being Trevor Ravenscroft's *The Spear of Destiny* (1972), no doubt the biggest inspiration for the Indiana Jones films,<sup>656</sup> Michael-Jean Angbert's *Les Mystiques du Soleil* (1971),<sup>657</sup> and Alan Baker's alarmingly under-researched *Invisible Eagle - The History of Nazi Occultism* (2000).<sup>658</sup>

In 1985, Professor Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke published his magnum opus *The Occult Roots of Nazism*. This ground-breaking work endeavoured to wipe away all of the fallacies that had accumulated on the topic in the previous 25 years, using only archival sources and keeping speculation to an absolute minimum: the result is a work that has stood the test of time, and is still today reckoned as one of the most important works on the topic.<sup>659</sup> Goodrick-Clarke ascribed the success of his book from the realisation that Nazism had been a political religion, and that 'its eschatological vision of genocide, clearly demonstrated the irrelevance of a Marxist analysis based on a critique of capitalism, economic factors and class interest'.<sup>660</sup> The occult influence, where present, was not downplayed, but assigned its natural role, with no extra emphasis or sensationalist claims added: being a political religion, in Goodrick-

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<sup>655</sup> At the Nuremberg Rally of 1938, Adolf Hitler had declared: 'We will not allow mystically-minded occult folk with a passion for exploring the secrets of the world beyond to steal into our Movement. Such folk are not National Socialists, but something else - in any case, something which has nothing to do with us. At the head of our program there stand no secret surmisings but clear-cut perception and straightforward profession of belief. But since we set as the central point of this perception and of this profession of belief the maintenance and hence the security for the future of a being formed by God, we thus serve the maintenance of a divine work and fulfill a divine will - not in the secret twilight of a new house of worship, but openly before the face of the Lord', quoted in Rainer Bucher, *Hitler's Theology: A Study in Political Religion* (London: Continuum, 2011), p. 39.

<sup>656</sup> Ravenscroft, *The Spear of Destiny*.

<sup>657</sup> Jean-Michel Angebert, *Les Mystiques du Soleil* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1971).

<sup>658</sup> Alan Baker, *Invisible Eagle - The History of Nazi Occultism* (London: Virgin Books, 2000).

<sup>659</sup> *Reassessing Nazi Occultism: Histories, Realities, Legacies*, ed. by Monica Black and Eric Kurlander (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2015), p. 1.

<sup>660</sup> Goodricke-Clarke, *Occult Roots*, p. vii.

Clarke's mind, he decided to analyse the antecedents of the Third Reich, which could have provided it with a *doctrinal* basis, and found what he was looking for in the Ariosophist circle, which had developed in Austria, between the 1890s and the 1930s, around the mentioned figures of Guido von List and Lanz von Liebenfels. In this movement, an interest in runes and sacred symbols (including the Swastika) was joined with a Theosophical approach to the doctrine of the Aryan man, and further mixed with strong anti-Semitic sentiments.<sup>661</sup> Goodrick-Clarke's book concludes by admitting that, so far as Ariosophy is concerned, some members of the Third Reich were indeed influenced by reading the garbled writings of List and Liebenfels, but that that was where the line must be drawn.

Having analysed, albeit very briefly, the relationship between occultism and the Third Reich, it is natural to ask the question: did Italian Fascism grow with certain ideas born from occultist milieus? The answer is far easier to reply to than the German case.

### 3.1. THE FASCIST LINK WITH OCCULTISM: THE 1920s

If Adolf Hitler, albeit only to a certain degree, was influenced by the Ariosophists in matters of race, the use of symbols and other aspects, Mussolini was most certainly not: he is reported to have said of his major ally in the war: 'Hitler possesses a heart of steel [...] of indomitable steel. His brain, however, is confused. He has something of the wizard and of the market-hall philosopher. He has created, for his own aims, a history, a politic, a geography of the world, and he only drinks from that well'.<sup>662</sup> In the preface to the first collection of articles to study the connection between esotericism and Fascism, Gianfranco de Turrís asks the question of whether it is possible to talk about an esoteric Fascism: his answer to the question

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<sup>661</sup> See Jörg Lanz von Liebenfels, *Der Weltkrieg als Rassenkampf der Dunklen gegen die Blondes* (Vienna: np., 1927) and especially idem, *Bibliomystikon oder die Geheimbibel der Eingeweihten*, 10 vols. (Pforzheim: np., 1929-34).

<sup>662</sup> Quoted in Giorgio Galli, *Hitler e la Cultura Occulta* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2015), p. 302: 'Hitler ha un cuore di acciaio... di indomabile acciaio. Il cervello tuttavia è confuso. Ha del mago e del filosofante da mercato rionale. Si è fatto, a suo uso e consumo, una storia, una politica, una geografia del mondo, e non beve che da quel pozzo'.

is worth quoting in full because it provides a definitive, and, in my opinion, correct answer from which the scholar may begin any further enquiries into the subject.

If we can talk, without erring too much, about a ‘Nazi esotericism’, given the many documents surfaced after the incredible but generic statements of *The Morning of the Magicians* by Louis Pauwels and Jacques Bergier, the same may not be said – no matter what some may think- of a ‘Fascist esotericism’, that is to say of an esoteric dimension, which is neither officially or unofficially, fascist: the personalities who led the movement, their culture and their spiritual predisposition (despite the many ties to Freemasonry) weren’t able to give life to an ‘esoteric’, ‘occult’ and by no means a ‘traditional’ dimension of Fascism.<sup>663</sup>

Having stated this, de Turrís is quick to say that there were, within the Fascist regime, personalities highly invested into the occult, which failed to influence Mussolini’s movement, or to steer it into an occult direction. Nevertheless, the consolidation of Mussolini’s power was also in part due to the elimination of any group or association, which could, behind closed doors, be working to undermine the new regime: therefore the 1920s witnessed a harsh lockdown on all masonic bodies, the prime targets for Mussolini, who despised the secretive nature of Freemasonry.

On 9 November 1925, Emilio Bodrero, minister of education, penned an introduction to a collection of surveys which had been conducted in the years 1912-1913 by the nationalist paper *Idea Nazionale*: the paper had interviewed high ranking members of the academic, the military and the political milieus, asking three short questions: whether a secret society such as Freemasonry still possesses a *raison d’être* compatible with modern public life; whether materialistic rationalism and an internationalist ideology, typical of Freemasonry, corresponds to the ideals of

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<sup>663</sup> Gianfranco de Turrís ‘Introduzione: Un’Ipotesi di Lavoro’, in *Esoterismo e Fascismo*, p. 10: ‘Se si può parlare, senza troppo sbagliare, di un “esoterismo nazista”, dati i documenti venuti alla luce dopo le clamorose ma generiche rivelazioni de *Il Mattino dei Maghi*, di Louis Pawels e Jacques Bergier, non si può invece parlare – checché ne possa pensare qualcuno- di un “esoterismo fascista”, vale a dire di una dimensione esoterica né ufficiale né ufficiosa del fascismo: le personalità che ne erano a capo, la loro cultura e la loro predisposizione spirituale (nonostante i molteplici contatti con la massoneria) non risultavano tali da poter dare vita ad una dimensione “esoterica”, “occulta”, né tantomeno “tradizionale” del fascismo’.

contemporary society; finally, whether the secret influence of Freemasonry in the educational system, the military and in the law system may be a benefit or cause a damage to Italy.<sup>664</sup> The replies to the questionnaire vary from the very lengthy, to the very succinct: Orientalist and University professor Francesco Beguinot (1879-1953) stated laconically that ‘to the three questions I answer with three no’s’;<sup>665</sup> others, like Reghini’s friend Giovanni Amendola was more articulate and wrote of the ‘futility of secrets in modern political life’ and that ‘the ideology of today’s democratic parties contrast greatly with the needs and goals of Italian society’;<sup>666</sup> archaeologist Giacomo Boni (1859-1925) went back to ancient Roman customs, writing that ‘like ancient Rome – in 186 BC – with the *Senatus Consultum de Bacchanalibus* (Deliberation of the Senate regarding Bacchanalia), so our Rome should open up towards the sunshine any remains of clandestine society’;<sup>667</sup> finally, even author Giovanni Verga (1840-1922), declared his opposition of the existence of Freemasonry in modern Italy, answering no to all three questions’.<sup>668</sup>

The interviews were over a decade old, but Bodrero’s new introduction made them appear relevant to the very year the book was published. This, of course brought to a tightening of the grip on secret societies and, to part of the readership, the content of the book seemed to justify the use of drastic measures. Interviewed by German-American war journalist Karl Henry von Wiegand (1874-1961), Mussolini had spoken against Italian Freemasonry in no uncertain terms:

In Germany in England, in America, the Masons are a charitable and philanthropic confraternity. In Italy, instead, Masons constitute a secret police. Even more and worst, they depend completely on the Grand Orient

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<sup>664</sup> Emilio Bodrero, *Inchiesta sulla Massoneria* (Milan: Mondadori, 1925), p. xxxi.

<sup>665</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20: ‘Alle tre domande rispondo con tre “no”’.

<sup>666</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5: ‘La futilità dei segreti nella vita politica moderna’ and ‘l’ideologia dei partiti democratici di oggi contrasta grandemente con i bisogni e le mete della società italiana’.

<sup>667</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28: ‘Come l’Antica Roma- nel 186 av. C., col senatconsulto *de bacchanalibus*- così l’Italia nostra spalanchi al sole ogni avanzo di società clandestine: *Il sole ucide gli invisibili*.

<sup>668</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 241.

of Paris. I hope the Italian Masons may become what the English and Americans are: a brotherly apolitical benefit society.<sup>669</sup>

The Nationalist movement had been the first to manifest serious animosity towards Freemasonry, and had made its ideas clear through the publishing of the questionnaire, which would constitute *Inchiesta sulla Massoneria*, to which Bodrero had added his introduction.<sup>670</sup> Once the Fascist regime had gained power, it had been quick to declare the incompatibility between Fascism and Freemasonry: the law passed in February 1923 *invited*

All Fascists who are also Freemasons to choose whether to belong to the Fascist National Party or to Freemasonry, since for Fascist there is but one discipline, the discipline of Fascism; but one hierarchy, the hierarchy of Fascism; but one, absolute, devoted and daily obedience to the Head and heads of Fascism.<sup>671</sup>

Already in 1923, the newspaper *Cremona Nuova* invited the State to gain access to the names of the Freemasons, in order to shoot them as traitors of the fatherland. Soon the temples in Turin, Pistoia, Lucca, Leghorn, Siena, Florence, Bari and Ancona were destroyed completely and set on fire. The Grand Lodge in Piazza del Gesù in Rome was turned upside down on 11 October 1925, and in this tense political climate the law to ban Freemasonry was passed, with 239 votes in favour and only 4 against. The law was then ratified by the Senate on 20 November of the same year. On 22 November, the Grand Master of the Grand Orient, Domizio Torrigiani (1876-1932) dissolved all of the lodges under his obedience and quit the publication of the prestigious masonic journal *Rassegna Massonica*, before being forced into exile by the regime. The name

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<sup>669</sup> Quoted in 'Documenti', *Esoterismo e Fascismo*, p. 39: 'In Germania, in Inghilterra, in America i massoni sono una confraternita caritatevole e filantropica. In Italia, invece, i massoni costituiscono un'organizzazione politica segreta. Di più e di peggio, essi dipendono completamente dal Grande Oriente di Parigi. Io auspico che i massoni italiani diventino quello che sono gli inglesi e gli americani: una confraternita apolitical di mutuo soccorso.

<sup>670</sup> Bodrero, *Inchiesta*, p. i-xxviii.

<sup>671</sup> Quoted in Venzi, *Massoneria e Fascismo*, p. 56: 'tutti i fascisti che sono massoni a scegliere tra l'appartenere al Partito Nazionale Fascista o alla Massoneria, poiché non vi è per i fascisti che una sola disciplina del Fascismo; che una sola gerarchia, la gerarchia del Fascismo; che una sola obbedienza assoluta, devota e quotidiana, al Capo e ai capi del Fascismo'.



of the law, never explicitly mentioned Freemasonry, but it was certainly its main aim, and, as written before, caused many Freemasons to seek refuge abroad.<sup>672</sup>

#### 4. GUÉNONIAN TRADITIONALISM

Before moving onto a specific analysis of how the laws against secret societies impacted the work of Reghini and Armentano, a section must be devoted to the philosopher who is by most scholars of the field considered to be the founding figure of Traditionalism: René Guénon (1886-1951).<sup>673</sup> The importance of Guénon cannot be underestimated, especially when we know of his friendship and correspondence with both Amedeo Armentano and Giulio Guerrieri, who both visited the French thinker in his Paris abode before the First World War:<sup>674</sup> before, that is, the formulation of his first Traditional theories, some of which, would end up influencing the *Schola Italica* too. Thus a short biography will be succeeded by his main theories and a brief analysis of his publications up to 1925. The final part of this section will be devoted exclusively to the analysis of the correspondence between Guénon and Reghini, which started in January 1923 and continued at least until 1935. In it, the reader will appreciate the crosspollination of ideas between René Guénon, who had already devoted himself to Eastern forms of spirituality to propagate his theories, and Arturo Reghini, who, while admiring the scope of Guénon's knowledge, preferred a more restricted and autochthone idea of Tradition. While the clash between the two thinkers is obvious, when tackling subjects such as that of the choice of the East as the sole remaining seat for unaltered initiatic knowledge, the reader could be surprised at the commonalities between the two thinkers. The correspondence shows Reghini as a

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<sup>672</sup> See Santi Fedele, *La Massoneria Italiana nell'Esilio e nella Clandestinità* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2005): p. 45-70.

<sup>673</sup> Primary sources by René Guénon have been listed throughout the dissertation; secondary sources of relevance include David Bisson, *René Guénon: Une Politique de l'Esprit* (Paris: Pierre-Guillaume de Roux, 2013); Jean-Pierre Laurant, *René Guénon, Les Enjeux d'une Lecture* (Paris: Dervy, 2006); Robin Waterfield, *René Guénon and the Future of the West* (Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2002 [1987]); Graham Rooth, *Prophet For A Dark Age: A Companion To The Works Of René Guénon* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2008); Mark Sedgwick, *Modern World*.

<sup>674</sup> Quoted in Sestito, *Figlio del Sole*, p. n189: Letter of Guerrieri to Armentano of 1 May 1910: 'I am often in the company of Guénon and I must retract what I wrote to you last time; luckily I will leave otherwise this mysterious man would drive me crazy for how terrible he is'.

sincere student of Eastern lore, but strong enough of his convictions to stand up to Guénon when writing about the alleged decline of Western systems of initiation. It will be suggested, in the light of this hitherto unpublished correspondence, that there has indeed been a process of exchange of ideas, which influenced both Guénonian Traditionalism and Roman Traditionalism.

#### 4.1. GUÉNON AND THE BIRTH OF TRADITIONALISM



René Guénon in Egypt, ca. 1935 - © Gallimard.

René Guénon was born in the town of Blois, France, on 15 November 1886, the son of architect Jean-Baptiste Guénon and Anna-Léontine Jolly, in a very strict Roman Catholic household.<sup>675</sup> Guénon scholar David Bisson has conveniently classified the French philosopher's life in three distinct periods.<sup>676</sup> Although there are many overlaps and some problems with dating the end or the beginning of said periods

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<sup>675</sup> Laurant, *Enjeux*, pp. 33-57.

<sup>676</sup> Bisson, 'La Tradition comme Pensée Gnostique', in idem, *Guénon*, pp. 25-96.

may arise, the division is very functional for the short biographical introduction I intend to provide the reader with. The first phase of Guénon's life is therefore referred to as *l'Intuition Gnostique* (the Gnostic Intuition), and spans from 1906 to the beginning of the Great War in 1914; the second phase, referred to as *l'Exposé Orientale* (the exposition to the Orient), which lasts from 1914 to his one way trip to Egypt in 1930; finally, the final part of his life is classified under the heading *La Synthèse Traditionnelle* (The Traditional Synthesis), spanning the years 1930-1932.

Early education was left to his aunt Mme. Duru, who would homeschool young René throughout elementary school, because of his fragile health. Throughout his boyhood, Guénon then frequented Jesuit-owned institutes, where he was noticed for his demeanour, shy and yet proud, and where he seemed to excel in mathematics and philosophy.<sup>677</sup> In 1904 he moved to Paris, in order to join the prestigious *École Polytechnique* (est. 1794). Having received his degree in mathematics, possibly seduced by the variety of options offered by *Belle Époque* Paris, Guénon decided against pursuing his academic career further and moved into a small flat in 51, rue Saint-Louis-en-l'Île, where he would entertain the friends he had made at the *École*.<sup>678</sup>

As Bisson correctly states, 'two major currents crossed the intellectual field from side to side: socialism as a way of political realisation and occultism as a way of individual salvation'.<sup>679</sup> For Guénon, who had always been interested in the ultimate causes of human existence and the seemingly infinite capabilities of human intellect, the choice of occultism was an obvious one. There seem to be many things in common in the early career of Guénon and Reghini, and this might help to explain why their long distance friendship was never troubled by arguments or major disagreements: both held a degree in mathematics and yet were deeply spiritual beings in their early approach to occult lore; both were to go through membership of many occult orders before setting themselves free from milieus that they would virulently attack in their later years, distancing themselves from the mistakes made in their youth. Frequenting occult circles in Paris at the beginning of the twentieth century meant rubbing elbows with one of the greatest figures of French, and may I venture to say, European, occultism: Gérard Encausse, better known by his magical name: Papus.<sup>680</sup> Papus can

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<sup>677</sup> Waterfield, *Guénon*, pp.13-16.

<sup>678</sup> Bisson, *Guénon*, p. 28.

<sup>679</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>680</sup> On Papus, see chapter 4.

well be seen, in this context, as the ‘catalyser of culture in full swing’.<sup>681</sup> Under Papus’s tutelage, Guénon joined the *Ordre Martiniste* (Martinist Order, est. 1884)<sup>682</sup> and Isis, a lodge, which depended directly from the Theosophical Society.<sup>683</sup> Both of these societies, as Mark Sedgwick has argued, were important sources for Guénon’s theories on Vedanta and Perennialism, and must have influenced Guénon’s future formulation of Traditionalism.<sup>684</sup> In 1908, Guénon abandoned both orders run by Papus, and strove to achieve for what he considered the most important of tasks for an occult initiate in the West: ‘to restore the Western tradition and turn occultism into a science that could be compared to the ones normally studied at university’.<sup>685</sup> In order to do so, he joined another occult order, this time not run by Papus or his associates, which had become more and more targets of the anti-masonic press: the *Église Gnostique de France* (The French Gnostic Church), a Christian body which had been founded in 1890, and had been revived in 1906 as a cultural association.<sup>686</sup> Through his membership in this Church, Guénon made three fundamental connections, which were to vastly influence the rest of his life: firstly, in 1908, he met Albert de Pouvourville (1861-1939), an adventure best known by the name Matgioi, who had travelled through China extensively and had elucidated on Daoist doctrines in his twin volumes *La Voie Métaphysique* (The Metaphysical Path, 1905) and *La Voie Rationnelle* (The Rational Path, 1907): the books, a curious interpretation of Lao Tsu’s (b. ca. 590 BCE) theories, that posited the existence of a primordial and untainted tradition in the East; secondly Guénon met Léon Champrenaud (1870-1925), best known by his Arab name Abdul-Haqq, who shared his knowledge of Sufism with René Guénon, and is considered instrumental in his future conversion to Islam; thirdly, and most importantly, Guénon, in those years met Swedish painter and Sufi Ivan Aguéli (1869-1917), one of the first Westerners to approach the more mystical side of Islam.<sup>687</sup> It was through Aguéli, known also as Abdul Hâdi, with whom Guénon became great

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<sup>681</sup> Bisson, *Guénon*, p. 29: ‘le catalyseur d’une culture en pleine effervescence’.

<sup>682</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>683</sup> See Albert de Pouvourville and Léon Champrenaud, *Les Enseignements Secrets de la Gnose* (Milan: Arché, 1999 [1907]).

<sup>684</sup> Sedgwick, *Modern World*, p. 40

<sup>685</sup> Bisson, *Guénon*, p 29: ‘restaurer la tradition occidentale et faire de l’occultisme un science à l’égale de celle qu’on enseigne dans les universités’.

<sup>686</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30-1.

<sup>687</sup> See Meir Hatina, ‘Where East Meets West: Sufism as a Lever for Cultural Rapprochement’, *International Journal of Middle East Studies* Vol. 39, pp. 389–409; Waterfield, *Guénon*, pp. 28–30.

friends, that he was finally initiated to Sufism under the name Abd-el Wâhed Yahia, in 1911.<sup>688</sup> The effect produced by these encounters in a gnostic occult framework, would start Guénon on his search for a pristine Tradition he could employ to arrive at the very source of the divine, and would provide him with three main theories, which were to accompany him for the rest of his life: ‘the divine and immemorial origin of a tradition, a world [the Western one] governed by evil, and the necessity of an initiatic conversion’.<sup>689</sup>

Having been dismissed by the military for his poor health, Guénon was able to find a job as a teacher in Sétif, Algeria: on 20 September 1917, where he was nominated Professor of Philosophy at the College de Saint-Germain. According to both Bisson and Jean-Pierre Laurant, in the period spent in Algeria, Guénon was able to meditate on two very important factors, which would strongly influence his future writings: the first one was his critique of the dominant Comtean positivistic outlook on life; the second was the substitution of the term *gnose* (gnosis) in his writing, for *métaphysique* (metaphysics). While the first point is intuitive, the second probably needs some explanation when it comes to the use of the word *métaphysique*: to Guénon, metaphysics was not simply a branch of philosophy studying the fundamental idea of being, as the term can be encountered in Aristotle (384-322 BC). Metaphysics is the knowledge of the Perennial Truth, which lies behind exoteric forms of religion. In essence, though changing the nomenclature, Guénon still retains a gnostic element to his approach to the word *metaphysique*, implying at all times a direct connection to a source of primordial knowledge, which has remained uncorrupted through the ages.<sup>690</sup> In 1921, Guénon published his first book, *Introduction Générale à l'Étude des Doctrines Hindoues* (A General Introduction to the Study of Hindu Doctrines).<sup>691</sup> The work is unconventional, in that it doesn't rely as heavily as other contemporary works on the subject on footnotes and quotations of Hindu texts. In the work Guénon criticises the ‘vogue of texts, of sources, of a bibliography’ and approaches the subject

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<sup>688</sup> See Waterfield, *Guénon*, p. 29.

<sup>689</sup> Bisson, *Guénon*, p. 31: ‘l'origine divine et immémoriale d'une tradition, un monde sous l'empris du mal, et la nécessité d'une conversion initiatique’.

<sup>690</sup> Waterfield, *Guénon*, pp. 56-66.

<sup>691</sup> René Guénon, *Introduction Générale à l'Étude des Doctrines Hindoues* (Paris: Marcel Rivière, 1921).

matter in his own style.<sup>692</sup> Faithful to the title of the work, Guénon gives his own definitions of the most important concepts connected to Hinduism: Vedanta, and its non-dualist (*Advaita*) expression are constantly lauded, and his conclusion is that atman (the Self) is the only reality on which the philosopher has to operate, in the hope of achieving *moksa*, an ascetic deliverance from the material world.<sup>693</sup> Moreover, it is in *Introduction* that we first read of another Guénonian leitmotif: the praise of the Brahminic caste, which has the mission of maintaining religious doctrine pristine, against the various attacks of the modern world.<sup>694</sup> As Bisson notices, Guénon ‘inaugurates an original reading of the East, which does not found itself on [Edward Said’s] ‘system of ideological fiction’, but rather on an idealised traditional model. The historical, geographic and religious complexity of India is reduced to an organic and spiritual unity [...].<sup>695</sup>

In the early 1920s René Guénon celebrated his complete detachment from the Parisian occult milieu with the publication of two texts: *Le Théosophisme, Histoire d'une Pseudo-Religion* and *L'Erreur Spirite*.<sup>696</sup> The text are an extraordinary tour-de-force aimed at dismantling the theories propagated by the Theosophical Society, on one hand, and the Spiritualist movement on the other. The main object of Guénon’s ironic lambasting is without doubt Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, but other figures, like that of Allen Kardec (1804-1869) with regards to Spiritism, also get their fair share. Such a crude distancing from the milieu that had introduced him to valuable ideas, which he subsequently would elaborate on and reformulate may seem quite excessive: to Guénon, the history of these two movements were a clear example of mental deviation brought on by the agencies of the modern world.<sup>697</sup> In 1924, having cleared the way from his past allegiances and influences, Guénon published what is considered to be his first work of substance: *Orient et Occident* (East and West). Along with *La Crise du Monde Moderne* (The Crisis of the Modern World), the French thinker develops his theories about a terminally ill West and a salvific East to

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<sup>692</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 296: ‘la manie des textes, des “sources” et de la bibliographie’.

<sup>693</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 254-5.

<sup>694</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 141 and 156.

<sup>695</sup> Bisson, *Guénon*, p. 45: ‘il inaugure une lecture originale de l’Orient qui ne se fonde pas sure un “système de fiction ideologique”, mais plutôt sure un modèle traditionnel idéalisé’.

<sup>696</sup> Guénon, *Théosophisme*, and idem, *Erreur*.

<sup>697</sup> Guénon, *Erreur*, p. 420: ‘ne constitue qu’un épisode de la foridable déviation mentale que caractérise l’Occident moderne’.

which modern man must turn to.<sup>698</sup> Influenced no doubt by the success of Oswald Spengler's (1880-1935) *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (The Decline of the West, 1918-1922), Guénon explores various avenues when thinking about how to save the West: the idea of an intellectual elite, which Reghini had also written about in the 1910s, is brought forth. According to Guénon, a small number of people should achieve a connection with the source of the Primordial Tradition in the East, and try and revive any moribund tradition still alive in the West.<sup>699</sup> In *Orient et Occident*, writing about the supposed elite, Guénon notes:

We have already alluded to the role which an intellectual elite may play, if it will be able to create itself in the Western world, or if it will function as a 'ferment' to prepare and lead in the most favourable sense a mental transformation, which will become necessary one day or another, whether we like it or not.<sup>700</sup>

1925 also marked the peak of Guénon's fame, as he was invited by the Sorbonne, to deliver a lecture on Oriental metaphysics, in which, once again, Guénon opposes the idea of a materialist West to the notion of a spiritual East.<sup>701</sup> As we shall see later on in this chapter, Guénon's exchange of ideas with Reghini would culminate with the French author's collaboration on Reghini's journals: one of such collaborations, *l'Esoterisme de Dante* (Dante's Esotericism, 1925), seemed to follow theories that Reghini had already developed in 'Imperialismo Pagano' and other writings prior to 1925: Guénon agreed with the representatives of the *Schola Italica* that the *Divina Commedia*, along with the *Aeneid* and other classics represented a 'metaphysical-esoteric allegory, which veils and unveils at the same time the various phases through which the conscience of the initiate must pass in order to achieve immortality'.<sup>702</sup>

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<sup>698</sup> René Guénon, *La Crise du Monde Moderne* (Paris: Bossard, 1927).

<sup>699</sup> Bisson, *Guénon*, p.53: 'comment contribuer à la formation de l'élite intellectuelle?'

<sup>700</sup> René Guénon, *Orient et Occident* (Paris: Payot, 1924), p. 10: 'Nous avons déjà fait allusion au rôle que pourrait jouer une élite intellectuelle, si elle arrivait à se constituer dans le monde occidental, où elle agirait à la façon d'un "ferment" pour préparer et diriger dans le sens le plus favorable une transformation mentale qui deviendra inévitable un jour ou l'autre, qu'on le veuille ou non'.

<sup>701</sup> Bisson, *Guénon*, p. 58.

<sup>702</sup> Guénon, *Ésotérisme*, p. 28: 'une allégorie métaphysico-ésotérique, qui voile et expose en même temps les phases successives par lesquelles passé la conscience de l'initié pour atteindre l'immortalité'.

In 1930, Guénon travelled to Egypt for what should have only been a trip to collect Sufi texts, but, through a series of fortuitous events, he remained in Cairo for the rest of his life, never to return to his homeland. In the first three year of permanence in Cairo, Guénon published two works, *Symbolisme de la Croix* (Symbolism of the Cross, 1931) and *États Multiples de l'Être* (Multiple States of Being, 1932), the first an expansion on a series of articles published years before on the journal *Gnose*, the second a study on the necessity of a 'metaphysical Infinity' and its relationship with 'universal Possibility'.<sup>703</sup> In the early 1930s Guénon met Sheikh Salama Hassan ar-radi (nd.), founder of the Hamidiya Shadiliya Sufi order, which he joined, and soon after another Sufi, Sheikh Mohammad Ibrahim, whose daughter Fatima he married in 1934. He died in 1951, survived by his wife and four children.<sup>704</sup>

Guénon's work, especially his contributions during the 1920s, has been considerable when taking into account the development of Traditionalist theories. Of course, the idea of a *Philosophia Perennis* handed down through the ages has been discussed in the introduction and other chapters of this dissertation, and does not seem to posit anything new. It was Guénon's fascination with Eastern doctrines that made him a giant of twentieth-century Traditionalist thought: his focus on Advaita-Vedanta and non-dualistic thought; his rejection of a Western form of spirituality in favour of Islam and Sufism; the creation of the idea of an *elite intellectuelle*; the supra-temporal, metaphysical conception of Tradition; the concept of cyclical time and the correspondence of Modernity with the lowest of the Hindu time-cycles: the Kali Yuga; the idea of counter-initiation: all these elements compose the varied tapestry of Guénon's writings and, it is most likely, as we shall see below, that Reghini was influenced by some of these ideas.

#### 4.2. GUÉNON AND TRADITIONALISM IN ITALY'S 1920s

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<sup>703</sup> See René Guénon, *Le Symbolisme de la Croix* (Paris: Véga, 1931) and idem, *Les États Multiples de l'Être* (Paris: Véga, 1932).

<sup>704</sup> Bisson, *Guénon*, pp. 210-215.



Guénon was very active in his contacts and collaboration with different exponents of the Roman Traditionalist milieu: the first contacts hark back to the early 1910s, when Armentano and Guerrieri had personally met the French thinker in his apartment in Paris. Guénon's ties with Guerrieri became even closer, as the member of the *Schola Italica* was wont to spend extended periods of time in the French capital, most of the times an honoured guest in the Guénon household. Roberto Sestito mentions letters that attest to the great esteem Armentano was held in by the French thinker, but unfortunately fails to reveal the exact sources. Guénon and Reghini had definitely known about each other before beginning their correspondence, and, despite the tastes in common for mathematics, calculus and literature, Reghini, until 1922, kept an ambivalent stance towards the French philosopher: an interesting case in point can be found in the criticism brought forth by the Florentine thinker towards Guénon's exclusion of the *Schola Italica*, among the few Western Traditions worthy to be saved. In his *Le Parole Sacre e di Passo dei Primi Tre Gradi ed il Massimo Mistero Massonico – Studio Critico e Iniziatico* (The Sacred Words and Pass-Words of the First Three Degrees and the Greatest Masonic Mystery: Critical and Initiatic Study, 1922), Reghini is quite critical of Guénon, when he writes:

The reader, with the right intentions, may thus choose. All Traditions are at his disposal; the Indian, the Chinese, the Jewish, the Rosicrucian, the druidic, the Arab, since all people have been masters of civilization and have produced masters and initiates, except of course Italy!<sup>705</sup>

In a note on the same page, Reghini targets Guénon personally: '[w]ith some astonishment we realise that even GUENON shares this appreciation. And yet he recognises that a movement that will bring closer again the West to the East, with regards to the metaphysic tradition, cannot start but from Latin countries (p. 342). Excluding Italy, the mission is in France's hands. Cicero pro domo sua?'<sup>706</sup> In the

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<sup>705</sup> Reghini, *Parole Sacre*, p. 195: 'Il lettore ben intenzionato può dunque scegliere. Tutte le tradizioni sono a sua disposizione; quella indiana, quella cinese, l'ebraica, la rosacroce, la druidica, l'araba, perché tutti i popoli sono stati maestri di civiltà e hanno prodotto maestri e iniziati, tranne s'intende l'Italia!'

<sup>706</sup> *Ibid.*, p. n195: 'Con un certo stupor constatiamo che anche il GUENON condivide questo apprezzamento. Pure egli riconosce che un movimento per riavvicinare l'Occidente all'Oriente, circa la tradizione metafisica, non può partire che dai paesi latini (p.342). Esclusa l'Italia, il compito spetta evidentemente alla Francia. Cicero pro domo sua?'

eleventh issue of the journal *Atanòr* (1925), Reghini reviews Guénon's *Orient et Occident*, but Sestito manages to find important divergences in what otherwise is a highly positive survey of the Frenchman's work.<sup>707</sup> Firstly, Reghini criticises Guénon for denying a Traditional continuity in the West, going up to their days: Reghini, of course felt strongly about the validity of his lineage of initiation, and could not let this detail slip; secondly, Guénon talks about Scholasticism in Medieval times as the last manifestation of a genuine Tradition in the West. Guénon, between the years 1925-1927, collaborated with a journal titled *Regnabit: Revue Universelle du Sacré-Coeur* (Regnabit: Universal Journal of the Sacred Heart, 1921-1929), and was very interested, for a period of time, in finding a Christian Tradition, which could help the West to be resurrected from its alleged terminal state: Reghini, of course, defended his idea of a Roman-Pythagorean unbroken chain, which was more than ready to awake Westerners from their slumber; thirdly, quoting Guénon, he writes: 'he thinks that it is extremely improbable that individualities, even isolated, may exist in the West';<sup>708</sup> and finally, Reghini criticised Guénon because of his statement about the West not having representatives of the symbolic 'centre of the world'.<sup>709</sup>

My opinion is that Guénon was very aware of the grey areas on which Reghini had commented, and had been voluntarily vague and pessimistic in his judgement of the West, because he wanted those 'isolated individualities' to make themselves manifest. Guénon had thrown down the gauntlet and was waiting to see if anyone would stand up to refute his views of the West expressed in *Orient et Occident*: specifically, it was the subject of the creation of an intellectual elite in the West, which could stir the European continent out of the morass of modernity. But what exactly was this 'elite intellectuelle', which Guénon wrote about throughout his early works and in *Orient et Occident* specifically? Guénon himself is very vague about the concept, even though he does give multiple definitions of what characterises the intellectual elite he envisages: 'The aptitudes we have in mind when we talk about an elite, are in the domain of pure intellect, cannot be determined by any exterior

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<sup>707</sup> Sestito, *Figlio del Sole*, p. 190.

<sup>708</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, p.190: 'egli ritiene disgraziatamente assai improbabile che esistano ancora in Occidente delle individualità anche isolate'.

<sup>709</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 191: 'centro del mondo'.

*criterium*, and are things which do not appear in “profane” instruction [...].<sup>710</sup> It seems that Guénon is referring to the ability to possess some transcendental knowledge, which may bring the member of the elite closer to the core of Tradition, although, in the West, Guénon considers such elite to be ‘non-existent’ and the exceptions to the case being ‘too few and too isolated’ from each other.<sup>711</sup> What is clear for Guénon is that the intellectual elite will never take the form of ‘a society with statutes, rules, reunions, and all the other exterior manifestations that this word entails’.<sup>712</sup> Nevertheless, the position Guénon takes in his text is that of extreme pessimism:

It is only in the East that one can actually find examples to aspire to; we have reason to believe that in the Middle Ages, the West also had organizations of the same type, but it is quite doubtful that sufficient traces survived for one to be able to begin to have a clear idea other than by analogy with those that exist in the East, an analogy based in any case, not on wanton suppositions, but on signs which do not deceive when one already knows certain things.<sup>713</sup>

On 1 September 1924, Reghini had been intrigued by a revival of the Western Tradition according to the *Schola*’s line, even if influenced by Eastern Traditionalism. He had written to Armentano asking him if he had read Guénon’s book and if he had received Guénon’s letter. ‘What measures do I have to take in regards to his manifest proposal to include us into an intellectual elite in order for the Occidental Tradition to

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<sup>710</sup> Guénon, *Orient et Occident*, pp 169-70: ‘Les aptitudes que nous avons en vue quand nous parlons de l’élite, et ant de l’ordre de l’intellectualité pure, ne peuvent [170] être déterminées par aucun critérium extérieur, et ce sont là des choses qui n’ont rien à voir avec l’instruction “profane” [...]’.

<sup>711</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 171: ‘Trop rares et trop isolés’.

<sup>712</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 174: ‘une société constituée avec des statuts, des règlements, des réunions, et toutes les autres manifestations extérieures que ce mot implique nécessairement’.

<sup>713</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 176: ‘C’est en Orient seulement qu’on peut trouver actuellement les exemples dont il conviendrait des’inspirer; nous avons bien des raisons de penser que l’Occident a eu aussi, au moyen âge, quelques organisations du même type, mais il est au moins douteux qu’il en ait subsisté des traces suffisantes pour qu’on puisse arriver à s’en faire une idée exacte autrement que par analogie avec ce qui existe en Orient, analogie basée d’ailleurs, non sur des suppositions gratuites, mais sur des signes qui ne trompent pas quand on connaît déjà certaines choses’.

receive the Oriental one?’<sup>714</sup> So, after all, Guénon had individuated some thinkers in the West that he thought would be well enough prepared to be part of his elite. In a letter dated 12 December 1924, Reghini tells Armentano of Guénon’s willingness to ‘organise something together’, given his great appreciation of the *Schola*’s work.<sup>715</sup> Armentano had advised caution to Reghini, and had preferred to wait to see how things would unfold without committing the *Schola* to any rash decision. Reghini, over the years, had become more and more confused with Guénon’s apparent flirtation with the Christian church: after he had translated *Le Roi du Monde* (The King of the World, 1927), an alarmed Reghini had again written to Armentano: ‘You must have seen in “The King of the World” with what indulgence and good disposition he treats Christianity, and maybe I wouldn’t have proposed to translate his work, if I could have predicted he would have gone so far down the line’.<sup>716</sup> The idea of an intellectual elite gradually slipped from both Guénon’s and Reghini’s minds, until Reghini heard, through mutual friends, about the difficulties that Guénon was going through, which characterised the end of the 1920s and can be summed up in health and financial issues, the death of his first wife and a supposed boycott the Catholic church had forced on his works after the publication of *La Crise du Monde Moderne*: ‘I have heard from others’, wrote Reghini to Armentano,’

of his difficult situation in Paris; he has been heard pronouncing my name often, as a sort of invocation, and I think that showing him true and intelligent sympathy other than being the right thing to do may also be a good way to make him realise that his attempt was illusory, and that it is not with priests that he can create an elite which he yearns for and neither obtain a *reddressement* of the West.<sup>717</sup>

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<sup>714</sup> Sestito, *Figlio del Sole*, p. 191: ‘che attitudine devo prendere alla sua manifesta proposta di far parte dell’elite intellectuelle per permettere all’Occidente di ricevere la Tradizione Orientale?’

<sup>715</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 192: ‘organizzare qualche cosa insieme’.

<sup>716</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 194: ‘Tu avrai visto nel “Re del Mondo” con quanta indulgenza e buona disposizione tratti il cristianesimo, e io forse non gli avrei proposto di farne la traduzione se avessi potuto prevedere che si sarebbe spinto fino a codesto punto’.

<sup>717</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 195: ‘Ho saputo da altri, che nella sua difficile situazione a Parigi, lo si è udito più spesso pronunciare il mio nome quasi ad invocarmi; e penso che il mostrargli in questo momento vera e intelligente simpatia oltre ad essere più che giusto può forse anche essere una buona idea che il suo tentativo era illusorio, e che non è coi preti che si può fare l’elite che egli vagheggia nè l’ottenere le *reddressement* dell’ Occidente’.

As many scholars interested in Guénon's work have noticed, Guénon had in fact located possible members of an intellectual elite in the Catholic Church. He was also working on a theory, that of a Western elite, although this no longer concerned him personally. As early as 1910, Guénon had converted to Islam and later joined a Sufi order. Soon after his problematic period in France, which Reghini described to Armentano in the previous letter quoted, the French philosopher would move to Cairo, never to return to his native land. It was therefore a problem worth writing about, but one that did not affect Guénon himself. On the other hand, Reghini lived in a country in which, as we have seen in the previous chapter, everything seemed to point to a renaissance of ancient Roman aesthetics, architecture, vogue and values. The sudden appearance on the scene of the Fascist regime, with its knowing nod to the greatness of Ancient Rome, seemed to happen at a perfect time: to Reghini, it was actually necessary to create an intellectual elite which could provide the new state with a renewed spiritual foundation, in order to make Italy great again. As Sestito writes, 'while Guénon and other esotericists like him, theorised on the *western tradition* sitting idly while waiting for the coming of miraculous "avatars", Reghini in Rome entered the arena with the overt aim to coagulate the pure forces of culture and of Western intellectuality in his journals'.<sup>718</sup> The difference between the more contemplative Guénon and the more militant Reghini were many, as were their interpretations of concepts such as the crisis of the West and of the intellectual elite. While Guénon had located the last period of adherence to Tradition with the scholastic middle ages, Reghini had seen in the Renaissance, and in the following centuries, a gradual but constant flowering of Pagan ideas and values: ideas which seemed to have come to possible fruition with the rise of the new regime in mid-1920s Italy. Far from escaping eastwards, Reghini had intuited that the time had come for a positive reactivation of the ancient Roman *mores*, in order to provide the new Fascist state with a solid, Pagan and Pythagorean base on which to build a new empire.

The following subsection, which will close this part of the chapter is an analysis of hitherto unpublished missives sent by Reghini to Guénon and vice versa.

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<sup>718</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 197-8: 'mentre Guénon e altri esoteristi come lui, teorizzavano sulla *tradizione occidentale* stando con le mani in mano in attesa della venuta di miracolosi "avatar" orientali, Reghini a Roma scendeva coraggiosamente in campo con lo scopo manifesto di coagulare intorno alle sue riviste le forze pure della cultura e dell'intellettualità occidentali'.

An analysis of such correspondence will be useful in order to show how Guénon was probably more influenced by theories circulating among members of the *Schola* than the Italian Traditionalists were inspired by the better known Guénon. In these missives, one can almost notice a veneration towards Guerrieri and Armentano on Guénon's behalf, and a very respectful tone towards Reghini, who, by the mid 1920s had published only articles and one single monograph, compared to the plethora of writings already published by Guénon.

#### 4.3. THE REGHINI-GUÉNON CORRESPONDENCE (1923-1926)

The correspondence exchanged between Arturo Reghini and René Guénon sheds lights on many factors concerning the relationship between these two thinkers, who, pitted against financial difficulties, never had the chance to meet each other in person: Guénon's letters had been published before by scholar Gastone Ventura, as an appendix to the reprint of the *Atanòr* journal and by Mariano Bizzarri, in his collection of Guenonian essays entitled *Il Risveglio della Tradizione Occidentale* (The Awakening of the Western Tradition, 2003).<sup>719</sup> Most of Reghini's responses to these letters have hitherto been unpublished and provide a clearer insight to Guénon's missives, filling in the gaps of the narrative, as it were.<sup>720</sup> The subjects dealt with in this ten-year correspondence are obviously many, ranging from the discussion on symbolism to the decline of the West, from an analysis of Christianity as a possible vehicle for the restoration of the West to more mundane matters, one could even venture to call it plain gossiping around the subject of the occult circles active at the time. For the sake of convenience, I have selected three nodal points in their correspondence, which I think will successfully summarise the voluminous corpus of letters exchange: firstly, the great respect each man had for the other's work is the paramount subject I shall be analysing; secondly, I will specifically target Guénon's *Le Roi du Monde*, its impact on Reghini and the exchange had around this fascinating work; finally, a focus on the figure of Julius Evola will exemplify the gossip-like

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<sup>719</sup> 'La Corrispondenza di René Guénon con Arturo Reghini', in René Guénon, *Il Risveglio della Tradizione Occidentale: I testi Pubblicati da Atanòr e Ignis*, ed. by Mariano Bizzarri (Roma: Atanòr, 2003), pp. 105-143.

<sup>720</sup> I will be referring to this part of the correspondence, kindly provided to me by the heirs of René Guénon, as the Archive Guénon, or AG, followed by the date of the letter.

aspect of part of the missives, which seem to anticipate the sharp break between the Florentine philosopher and the Roman Baron in the years to come.

Since Reghini's first letter, sent on 17 December 1923, the figures of Armentano and Guerrieri seem to provide the *trait d'union* between the two thinkers. Correspondence dating back to 1910, between Guénon and the two members of the Schola is still extant, and Guénon appears to hold both in the highest esteem: it is entirely possible that Reghini's connection with Armentano and Guerrieri facilitated the beginning of this long epistolary friendship.<sup>721</sup> Reghini's appreciation of Guénon's work seems to mostly cover the entire spectrum of Guénon's literary interest. On 8 January 1924, Reghini writes to send his appreciation of Guénon's work on Vedanta: having read the first instalments of the work on the revue *La Gnose*, Reghini declares himself to be 'enchanté' regarding the possibility of a monograph devoted to the subject.<sup>722</sup> On 16 March of the same year, while translating Guénon's articles into Italian in order to publish them in the journal *Atanòr*, Reghini writes that he had 'already read and translated his article with a true pleasure of the spirit. Your writings', continued Reghini, 'are by now so familiar to me that I can appreciate even the nuances, and I enjoy your discrete irony'.<sup>723</sup> Guénon, on his side, was just as lavish with compliments, as his Italian correspondent: the most important endorsement, which has impressive repercussions if analysed correctly, is to be found in a missive dated 19 June 1924: here Guénon is discussing about the corrections Reghini made about the article which would then form the basis for the work *L'Éstoterisme du Dante*. The French author seems to treat Reghini as an equal, when it comes to the discussion of Traditional thought, and, more than that, seems to relinquish any will or possibility of knowing more than Reghini in the domain of Western Traditions and the possibilities to revive them:

Thank you for what you say about my study; I notice that we always agree on the essential. On the subject that you submit to me about the existence

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<sup>721</sup> AG - 17 December 1923

<sup>722</sup> AG – 8 January 1924: 'Je savais que vous avez préparé un ouvrage sur le Vedanta; et j'en suis enchanté, car j'ai beaucoup regretté de ne pas voir la fin de votre étude sur le Vedanta dans la Gnose'.

<sup>723</sup> AG – 16 March 1924: 'déjà lu et même traduit votre article avec un véritable plaisir de l'esprit. Vos écrits me sont désormais tellement familiers que je peux le suivre jusque dans leurs nuances, et m'amuser avec votre ironie discrète'.

of a Western tradition, this is very correct, and corresponds to an issue that worries me just as it worries you; if, today, there exist authentic representatives of this tradition, how is it possible to gain contact with them? *Here is a difficulty that you are in a much better place to overcome, since, under the intellectual point of view, I am much closer to the Orient than I am to the Occident. Would you be as kind as to tell me your thoughts on this subject [italics mine]?<sup>724</sup>*

The importance of this quote cannot be overstated: the main representative of twentieth-century Traditionalism seems to be treating Arturo Reghini as an equal in one of the most thorny subjects at hand. Not only does he profess his disadvantage because of his intellectual framework: Guénon seems to see in Reghini somebody who can possibly illumine his theories with a fresh input of the Roman Traditionalist perspective.

While Guénon's work on the idea of esotericism within Dante's work was received favourably by Reghini, it is Guénon's *Le Roi du Monde* which seems to have resonated more strongly with the Florentine author: the day after finishing the translation of the complete work, on 14 September 1926, Reghini wrote intense words of praise for the booklet, describing it as 'a small volume with a great importance'.<sup>725</sup> Reghini had been greatly stimulated by the idea of the 'existence, nowadays [...], of a supreme spiritual centre' and by 'the many arguments used to bolster your [Guénon's] "revelation"'.<sup>726</sup> Such an idea probably opened Reghini to the concept of a universal Tradition, of which the Roman one was but a single facet, bringing him, as we shall see in the following quote, almost full-circle with his Theosophical period. The existence of such a centre, Agartha, had been postulated previously by Alexandre

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<sup>724</sup> Guénon, *Risveglio*: p. 120: '19 Giugno 1924 [...]. Grazie per ciò che dite a proposito del mio saggio; vedo che siamo sempre d'accordo sull'essenziale. In quanto all'osservazione che mi rivolgete a proposito della persistenza della tradizione occidentale, questa è molto giusta, e corrisponde ad una questione che mi preoccupa tanto quanto voi; se, a tutt'oggi, esistono rappresentanti autentici di questa tradizione, come è possibile entrare in contatto con loro? C'è qui una difficoltà che voi probabilmente siete meglio collocato per poterla risolvere, dato che, sotto il profilo intellettuale, io sono molto più vicino all'Oriente che non all'Occidente. Sareste tanto gentile da dirmi cosa pensate su questo argomento?'

<sup>725</sup> AG – 14 September 1926: 'Il me semble que ce petit écrit est d'une très grande importance'.

<sup>726</sup> AG – 14 September 1926: 'l'existence, aujourd'hui, [...] d'un centre spirituel suprême' and 'les arguments nombreux avec le quels vous appuyez votre "revelation"'



Saint-Yves d'Alveydre, French occultist, and Ferndynand Ossendowski, G.I. Gurdjieff's (1866-1949) most renowned disciple, and Reghini mentions this to Guénon in a missive dated 5 November 1924.<sup>727</sup> In the same letter, Reghini discusses the possibility of Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831-1891) having written about the same subject in her *The Secret Doctrine* (1888), thus showing good familiarity with the subject at hand.

The majority of the corpus of letters at hand deals with corrections to translations of Guénon's works made by Reghini, the exchange of French and Italian journals that could be of interest to either author, and in a smaller part about more serious subjects on occultism or Traditionalism. It is amusing to find, peppered here and there in the letters, allusion to contemporary events within the Italian and French occult milieus, and the witty and eager way with which both authors seem to tackle these subjects seems to provide them with a more human side hitherto left unscrutinized. Among the many figures, which fell under the sharp pens of Reghini and Guénon were Martinists, such as Giulio Sacchi, French Anthroposophists and Benito Mussolini himself: as we shall see in more detail in the following chapter, Mussolini, under the pseudonym Fermi, had written an article on the paper *Gerarchia* (Hierarchy, est. 1922), a publication that Mussolini himself had founded.<sup>728</sup> In it, he took a strong defence of Catholic ideas, perhaps writing on subjects he was not too familiar with: the article was a response to a previous piece written by Reghini titled 'Campidoglio e Golgota', (Capitol Hill and Golgotha, 1924).<sup>729</sup> Neither Reghini, nor Guénon seemed to be aware of who was actually writing behind the pseudonym Fermi, but Guénon's comment on the article was nevertheless scathing:

Whoever the author of the article may be, he clearly shows, towards the end, that he has not understood the essential distinction between metaphysical and initiatic knowledge and profane knowledge (when he talks about the "Nuova Accademia" etc.) and similarly, that he knows

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<sup>727</sup> AG – 5 November 1924: 'Dans le manuel bibliographique de Caillet, en parlant de Saint-Yves d'Alveydre et de l'Agartha on dit que la Blavatsky aussi en parle'.

<sup>728</sup> Fermi [Benito Mussolini], 'Cronache del Pensiero Religioso', *Gerarchia* (1924), pp.637-642.

<sup>729</sup> Arturo Reghini, 'Campidoglio e Golgota', *Atanòr* 1:3 (1924), p. 146.

nothing of Oriental doctrines: his classification of “mystical” works and “moral” works is quite funny!<sup>730</sup>

Not even Mussolini was spared from Guénon’s humour. But the target of most of the two authors’ brunt was without doubt the young and upcoming Traditionalist and colleague Julius Evola. As we shall see in the next chapter, Evola’s break with Reghini was an important event in the life of both thinkers, and can possibly be the proof of all the allegations made by Reghini and Guénon in the previous year. That Evola’s fame may have overshadowed his dastardly behaviour is possible: the first letter to contain a remark on Evola is dated 19 June 1924, and contains a critique of Evola’s excessive, according to Guénon, attachment to the theories of German philosophers:

The sixth issue of *Atanòr* arrived the day after you wrote. As you had predicted, I only have some reserves on Evola’s article; even though you presented it in the best of ways. What need is there to complicate things with all those considerations copied from German philosophy?<sup>731</sup>

Soon in the correspondence, the attacks on Evola become increasingly hostile, and in Reghini’s letter to Guénon dated 13 December 1924, he wrote:

Regarding Evola, who is very young and much persuaded of being something special, I’ll tell you that before reading *Orient et Occident* he criticised you claiming that you are a rationalist. According to him, one must bring oneself to such a point that the will becomes absolutely powerful.<sup>732</sup>

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<sup>730</sup> Guénon, *Risveglio*, p. 132: ‘Chiunque sia l’autore di quell’articolo, mostra chiaramente, verso la fine, che non ha compreso la distinzione essenziale tra la conoscenza metafisica ed iniziatica e il sapere profano (quando parla di “Nuova Accademia, etc.) ed altresì che non conosce nulla delle dottrine orientali: la sua classificazione delle opere “mistiche” e “moralì” è piuttosto divertente!’

<sup>731</sup> *Ibid.*: ‘Il numero 6 di *Atanòr* mi è pervenuto il giorno dopo avervi scritto. Come avevate previsto ho delle riserve solo al riguardo dell’articolo di Evola; anche se voi lo avete presentato nel modo migliore. Che necessità c’è a complicare le cose con tutta quelle considerazioni ricalcate dalla filosofia tedesca?’

<sup>732</sup> AG – 13 December 1924: ‘A’ propos d’Evola, qui est très jeune et très persuadé d’être quelque chose de special, je vous conteraì que après avoir lu “Orient et Occident” il vu a

In a later letter, Reghini, while informing Guénon of Evola's intention of writing a book on Tantra, *L'Uomo e la Potenza* (Man and Power, 1926), cannot resist a jibe towards the younger philosopher: 'do you know Evola is preparing a work on Tantra and he doesn't know Sanskrit? He must know Greek and Latin very badly since he never pursued classical studies; and yet what a display of Greek!'<sup>733</sup> Guénon would take up this very subject in his letter dated 21 April 1925, in which he asks Reghini about news on Evola's tantric work and an evaluation of Evola's translation of the *Tao Te Ching* (1923):

Mister [Guido] De Giorgio asks me what value Evola's translation of the *Tao Te Ching* might have; I have not read it, I don't trust him since the author does not know the language. Regarding Evola, how is his work on Tantra going? It will without a doubt be a reproduction of the works of Sir John Woodroffe; unfortunately even he knows very little Sanskrit and what is even more peculiar is that he makes incredible blunders even when writing in English, which, if I am not mistaken, is his mother-tongue.<sup>734</sup>

What can we infer from the correspondence between these two fundamental figures in the history of Traditionalism? Certainly, that both treated each other as equals and were equally interested in the other's opinion on a vast array of matters. Roberto Sestito has written that 'An influence, even indirect, of Guénon on Reghini must be excluded', keeping the exchange of information of two colleagues out of the equation. My opinion is more nuanced than Sestito's: Guénon definitely influenced Reghini on two main factors: firstly with theories concerning the intellectual elite, which Reghini had hinted at, but had never set into a coherent theoretical framework

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critique en vous accusant d'être un rationaliste. Pour lui on doit se porter à un tel point que la volonté aoit absolument puissante'.

<sup>733</sup> AG – 13 April 1925: 'Savez vous que Evola qui prepara un ouvrage sur le Tantra ne connait pas le Sanscrit? Il doit connaitre très mal aussi le latin e le grec car il n'a pas fait les études classiques; e pourtant quel luxe de grec!'

<sup>734</sup> Guénon, *Risveglio*, p. 138: 'Il Signor de Giorgio mi chiede che valore può avere la traduzione del Tao fatta da Evola; non l'ho letta, però, in base a quanto Egli mi ha detto, non mi fido dato che l'autore non conosce la lingua. A proposito di Evola, a che punto sta il suo lavoro sul Tantra? Sarà senza dubbio una riproduzione più o meno arangiata delle opera di Sir John Woodroffe; malauguratamente anche quest'ultimo sa ben poco di sanscrito e ciò che è ancor più singolare è che commette errori inversolimili anche quando scrive in inglese, che, se non vado errato, è la sua lingua madre'.

like Guénon had in *Orient et Occident*; secondly the publication of *Le Roi du Monde* seemed to change Reghini's perspective: the correspondence, in the passages quoted above, seems to confirm this change, from the belief of a particular Tradition, higher and more noble than the others, namely the Roman Tradition, to a more universalist approach to the validity of other, Eastern traditions. This is a subject, which would deserve a study of its own, but it is clear from the correspondence that Reghini had matured enough to recognise the validity of other religious Traditions with regards to initiation and to the reversal of the tide of modernity. Guénon, on the other hand, had already devoted his life to Islamic mysticism years before his first contact with Reghini: the question of the West seems to interest him greatly, but it does not appear to constitute a problem that threatened him personally. In the correspondence, he is more than happy to consider Reghini the expert, when dealing with Western traditions, and he clearly seems to be happy with his choice of preferring Mecca over Rome. Nevertheless, Reghini's erudition on Western religious traditions and his expertise on the esoteric Dante influenced his future writings and Guénon, in my opinion, came away as enriched as Reghini with what concerns their respective intellectual pursuits. What appears from the letters is a friendship, which could have produced much more interesting developments if the two had ever had the chance to meet in person, but for this and other reasons, remained until 1935, year of the last letters between the two, an epistolary relationship.

## **5. ROMAN TRADITIONALISM FROM 1920 TO 1925**

### **5.1. THE END OF THE BEGINNING**

Once the war was over, Reghini began what is considered to be the most prolific decade of his life in terms of writing and publishing: the 1920s. Between 1919 and 1920, the philosopher travelled to Armentano's tower in Scalea, in order to discuss future possibilities for the *Schola's* manifestation in the public and political sphere. Once back in Rome in the spring of 1920, Reghini obtained the permanent position of professor at the *Scuola Tecnica di Portoferraio* (Portoferraio Technical School) on the Isle of Elba, in Tuscany.<sup>735</sup> In the period going from February to

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<sup>735</sup> Sestito, *Figlio del Sole*, p.123.

September, when his teaching position started, he moved to Rome and obtained a contract for the translation of Robert Louis Stevenson's (1850-1894) masterpiece *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886). In addition to his work as a translator, Reghini also found time to pen his first book, *Le Parole Sacre e di Passo*. As Sestito rightly notes in his biography, this text is a classic among twentieth-century masonic literature, and it is probably the main reason why Reghini is remembered by a wider masonic audience nowadays. In it, he urges for a *restitutio ad pristinum*, a return to the origins, as it were, of Freemasonry, and in his incipit he quotes Niccolò Machiavelli, the famous Renaissance humanist and political theorist: 'If we want a sect or a republic to live long it is necessary to pull it back towards its beginning' and 'these alterations are to the benefit of those who reduce them to their own principles'.<sup>736</sup> In his book, Reghini criticises the degeneration of Freemasonry in the previous two centuries and auspicates a return to the origins according to the ideals propounded by the *Schola Italica*. The idea of bringing Freemasonry back to its origins did not represent a mere nostalgic need by Reghini: throughout the text he seems to be clear that real knowledge is definitely not hidden in texts, scrolls or books. In Reghini's mind though, in a very Pythagorean fashion, 'it is supremely important to give back to the words, to the ceremonies, their real traditional value, so that, through their help, the intellect may learn self-discipline and to penetrate their hidden value'.<sup>737</sup> One of the most fascinating theses Reghini put forth was that of a distinction between a 'critical' and an 'initiatic study' of the Pass Words, considering the initiatic study of them the only tool that could bring the realization that 'the central idea is therefore the ancient Mediterranean idea of privileged survival, of resurrection to the immortality of death, of palingenesis attained through the mystic death'.<sup>738</sup> The discourse of privileged initiation is omnipresent, and Reghini also gives us a definition of initiation, which, as Sestito remarks, must include three factors: 'knowledge; immortality;

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<sup>736</sup> Reghini, *Parole Sacre*, p. i: 'A volere che una seta o una repubblica viva lungamente è necessario ritrarla spesso verso il suo principio' and 'quelle alterazioni sono a salute che le riconducono verso i principi loro'.

<sup>737</sup> Reghini, *Parole Sacre*, p. vii 'è supremamente importante restituire alle parole, alle cerimonie, il loro valore tradizionale, cosicché, attraverso il loro aiuto l'intelletto possa imparare l'autocontrollo e penetrarne il loro valore segreto'.

<sup>738</sup> Reghini, *Parole Sacre*, p. 25: 'L'idea central è dunque l'antica idea mediterranea della sopravvivenza privilegiata, della resurrezione alla immortalità dalla morte, della palingenesi insomma conseguita attraverso la morte mistica'.

beatitude and perfection'.<sup>739</sup> As mentioned before in this dissertation, Reghini had discovered and copied Tommaso Campanella's *La Pratica dell'Estasi Filosofica* (The Practise of Philosophical Extasy, nd.) from a manuscript that had been found in the early 1910s at the Magliabecchiana library in Florence.<sup>740</sup> Reghini recognised in Campanella a member of the unbroken chain of representatives of the *Schola Italica* and had practiced the prescribed exercises for at least 10 years before writing the book. In *Le Parole Sacre* he describes the technique used to help gain higher knowledge, or philosophical ecstasy:

It is an unsurpassed page of the technical initiatic literature, and the Western esoteric tradition casts glimmers of light thanks to this neo-Pythagorean from Southern Italy, heroically fighting Christian ferocity and ignorance. We don't think that among the French [lit. Transalpini] there are many that may hope to compete in the realms of metaphysical knowledge with this heir and exponent of the *Schola Italica*.<sup>741</sup>

Reghini's attempt to link the origins of masonic words to the Eleusinian mysteries and to other Mediterranean traditions may appear naïve to those who have studied the Judeo-Christian provenance of most masonic Pass Words, but the chance to sponsor his own heritage and to downplay Christianity and Judaism at the same time, in my opinion, was regarded as too good to turn down.

Reghini's position regarding which masonic body to join, among the two main obediences, was settled in Scalea, after a long deliberation with his master Armentano and on 20 September 1921, Reghini joined the Scottish Rite, at the time lead by Raul Palmeri (1864-1948): his induction was followed by a speech of the newly initiated Reghini, who, according to Sestito, went back to the figure of Dante and left no doubts on his political inclination towards his heathen brand of imperialism. His old enemy Frosini had tried to create obstacles and thwart Reghini's initiation into the Scottish Rite, but he was expelled more or less at the same time as the Florentine

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<sup>739</sup> Sestito, *Figlio del Sole*, p. 154: 'la conoscenza; l'immortalità; la beatitudine e la perfezione'.

<sup>740</sup> Found at Biblioteca Nazionale di Firenze, *Manoscritto Magliabechiano*, Classe VIII, codex 6, XVII century, cm. 20x28, 557 folios.

<sup>741</sup> Sestito, *Figlio del Sole*, p. 162.

philosopher was initiated: biographer di Luca suspects a *longa manu* intervention on behalf of Armentano, from his quarters in Scalea.<sup>742</sup> Reghini, always one who would have the last word, had written an article titled ‘Due Parole al Dott. Frosini’ (A Few Words to Dr. Frosini, 1921) in the pages of the *Rassegna Massonica*, which he had just been nominated editor of:

I own a small booklet where [...] I write down all the doodling and the idiotic statements printed by various masonic authors. At the head of the list is Br. Ulisse Bacci, but Frosini does not tag that far away, and since he is still young and his intelligence is developing floridly, I believe that even in this he will end up being ahead of everyone. It is only a matter of time [...].<sup>743</sup>

When the law of 14 February 1923 came out, effectively outlawing Freemasonry, while Raul Palermi faltered, a splinter group, which would oppose the Fascist regime’s decision, was created, and the group itself launched its own journal, titled *Fenice* (Phoenix, est. 1923). Although Reghini was tempted to join the secessionist group, which he had hoped to influence with his political and esoteric ideas, Armentano had called him to remain faithful to the oaths made at the time of his initiation, and Reghini ended staying in the Scottish Rite, abandoned by some of his closest friends, such as Moretto Mori, and trying to coexist with Raul Palermi, who had by then lost control of his lodges. Reghini tried to keep Palermi away from the pressures of the clerical-Fascist power, but Palermi still believed in his chances of striking a deal with the regime.<sup>744</sup> Reghini’s vicinity to Palermi made him a prime target for the newly born *Fenice*, who, in an article, had branded Reghini, out of all the Freemasons, as filo-Jesuit.<sup>745</sup> The reasons behind these accusations are to be found in the masonic political stances taken by the Grand Master of the Grand Orient of Italy Domizio

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<sup>742</sup> di Luca, *Reghini*, p. 65-6.

<sup>743</sup> Reghini, ‘Due Parole al Dottor Frosini’, *Rassegna Massonica* 6-7 (1921), quoted in di Luca, *Reghini*, p. 65: ‘Io ho un quadernetto in cui [...] vado segnalando gli sfarfalloni e le marronate stampate dai vari autori massonici. Capolista nell’elenco è il Fr. Ulisse Bacci, ma il Frosini non rimane indietro di molto, e poiché è ancora giovane e la sua intelligenza si sviluppa folridamente, io ritengo che anche in questo finirà coll’emergere sopra tutti. È solo una questione di tempo [...]’.

<sup>744</sup> See Sestito, ‘La Massoneria Fuorilegge’, in idem, *Figlio del Sole*, pp. 136-145.

<sup>745</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 143.

Torregiani and of the head of the Scottish Rite, Raul Palmeri: while Torregiani had immediately suggested that all Fascists leave the Grand Orient, Palmeri had published an official announcement on 15 February, stating that his masons

devotedly obey the Fascist hierarchy, superior to all contingencies, and thus may continue to serve the Fatherland and the Fascist organization, loyal and disciplined towards the supreme leader Benito Mussolini.<sup>746</sup>

Still, Reghini seemed to maintain faith in Mussolini's anti-Catholic behaviour, and in his article 'L'Intolleranza Cattolica e lo Stato' (Catholic Intolerance and the State, 1923), wrote that even though 'Catholics, nationalists, Jesuits, and all the sons of priests' tried to impose themselves on the new government and take advantage of Freemasonry's crisis, 'that a devotion of Italian politics towards the clerical demands, may be in the intentions of Mussolini, does not appear to us an idea that may be entertained honestly'.<sup>747</sup> In-between accusations of being a friend of the Jesuits and the fall of all masonic bodies, Reghini decided to leave Rome for the more tranquil Scalea, to spend the summer months with his master Armentano. There, new ideas were concocted to manifest the *Schola Italica* in the public world. Marco Rossi, in his analysis of these incredibly complicated years has written:

Reghini finds himself far away from the lodge of Palazzo Giustiniani because of his Fascist sympathies and his antidemocratic convictions, which explains his activities in the supreme Scottish counsel of Piazza del Gesù'; but, at the same time, he does not follow the line of Mussolini devoted to finding an agreement with the Catholic Church, a line [...] that his superior Palmeri approved of unconditionally.<sup>748</sup>

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<sup>746</sup> Quoted in di Luca, *Reghini*, p. 71: 'obbediscono devotamente alla gerarchia fascista, superior a tutte le contingenze e quindi possono continuare a servire la Patria e l'organizzazione Fascista, fedeli e disciplinati al supremo duce Benito Mussolini ed al suo governo'.

<sup>747</sup> Arturo Reghini, 'L'Intolleranza Cattolica e lo Stato', in *Paganesimo, Pitagorismo, Massoneria*, pp. 159-164 [159]: 'I Cattolici, i nazionalisti e tutti i figli di preti' and 'una dedizione della politica italiana alle pretese clericali possa essere nelle intenzioni di Mussolini, non ci sembra dunque che possa sostenersi onestamente'.

<sup>748</sup> Marco Rossi, 'L'Interventismo Politico', p. 499: 'il Reghini si trova distante dalla loggia di Piazza Giustiniani a causa delle simpatie fasciste e per personali convinzioni antidemocratiche, ciò spiega la sua attività nel supremo consiglio di Piazza del Gesù; ma nello stesso tempo non concorda affatto con la linea mussoliniana votata alla ricerca di un



## 5.2. THE BEGINNING OF THE END

Back from Scalea, it was decided that Reghini and the other few representatives of the *Schola Italica* would create a Pythagorean association in Rome. In October 1923, Reghini informed Armentano of the situation at hand: The owner of the hotel *Des Étrangers* in Rome, Gino Gori (1876-1952), who offered a place for the group to meet in his hotel, had also offered the monthly sum of 200 lire to finance an independent journal which would cover themes dear to the *Schola*. In his letter, Reghini wrote: ‘I think the moment has come in which we have a small base and the times are ripening for the institution of a movement, of a Journal of an Order of ours’.<sup>749</sup> As Sestito notes, Reghini was convinced that granting the new order an imperialist and thoroughly Italic connotation, he could have bypassed Mussolini’s ban on masonic bodies. A delegation of representatives from the Scottish Rite met Mussolini on 9 November 1923. Again, Armentano was informed by letter that ‘Mussolini showed much cordiality and there was an important exchange of ideas and projects [...]’.<sup>750</sup> On 18 December 1923, the *Associazione Pitagorica* (Pythagorean Association) was created, with Reghini at its head and the decision upon the publication of a journal was voted for: the journal would be called *Atanor, Rivista di Studi Iniziatici* (Atanor, Journal of Initiatic Studies, 1924). Other participants included old members of the *Rito Filosofico* and of the *Schola Italica*, such as Mori, Guerrieri, Salvi and Procacci. The culminating period called by author Augusto Hermet *La Ventura delle Riviste* (The Destiny of the journals) was about to start, and in five fiery years, Reghini would have directed three journals dealing with Pythagoreanism, imperialism, Paganism and occultism. The contrasts between editors like Reghini and the regime, though, was about to hit its most critical point.

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accord con la chiesa cattolica, linea [...] che il suo superiore Palermi appoggiava incondizionatamente’.

<sup>749</sup> Sestito, *Figlio del Sole*, p. 146: ‘mi pare che il momento sia venuto in cui abbiamo finalmente un poco di base e i tempi vanno maturando per la istituzione di un movimento, di una Rivista e di un Ordine nostro’.

<sup>750</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 148: ‘Nel ricevimento della nostra delegazione ieri, Mussolini mostrò molta cordialità e vi fu uno scambio di idee e di propositi importanti [...]’.

## 6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

After a historical introduction, I have highlighted the similarities between Fascism and Traditionalism, in their identical reflection on Modernity as an ending of all things past, but also as a new beginning and a restoration of values and ideals corrupted by the modern world. I believe Frank Kermode's approach to literature and Roger Griffin's study of Fascism clearly mark the similarities between the political movement led by Mussolini and the esoteric one led by Armentano. Reghini's optimism and belief in Mussolini can also be traced down to Griffin's theories on the sense of a new beginning.<sup>751</sup>

The state of research on the intersection between Fascism and occultism has been highlighted, and I believe that the use of Griffin's construct of Social Occult Modernism may provide future research with a new and, in my opinion, effective tool. The study of the Nazi milieu and its comparison to the Fascist one proves that de Turrís's intuition, that according to which it is not possible to speak of a Fascist occultism or an occult Fascism holds true, even if much research still needs to be made. Although brief, the section should have made clear Mussolini's complete lack of ties to occult circles, as his quote describing Hitler as 'wizard and market-hall philosopher' should have clarified.

The complete Guénon-Reghini correspondence has been used effectively to prove the Italian Traditionalists' close ties to René Guénon, in matters regarding the concept of intellectual elite and the esotericism in Dante, for example. My theory that the *Schola* might have had some influence on Guénon's ideas and vice-versa, an idea rejected by Reghini scholar Sestito, seems to acquire more credibility in the light of this correspondence, in which Guénon seems to inform some of Reghini's ideas such as that of the universality of Tradition and the existence of a spiritual hierarchical centre, be it called Agartha or Shambala.

The fifth section was of a historical nature and sought to trace the reactions of the *Schola* members in the wake of the rise of Fascism. Articles, letters and book

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quotes have all been used to prove that the two years 1924-1925 were probably the most important for Armentano and Reghini, and that both believed the times were finally ripe for a manifestation of the Pagan imperialist current.

In the following chapter I will be analysing the journals, which Reghini edited and wrote for, and will be considering the end of the *Schola's* dream, summed up in the Lateran accords between the Vatican and the Fascist Regime, in 1929.

## CHAPTER 7:

### THE *UR* GROUP AND THE END OF A DREAM (1923-1929)

‘Per l'uomo della Tradizione, rivolgersi verso il passato e non verso l'Alto significherebbe voler bere allo stagno, potendo invece bere alla fonte’.<sup>752</sup>

Gruppo dei Dioscuri

#### 1. SCOPE OF THE CHAPTER

This chapter is going to be clearly demarcated in two main sections: the first will deal with Reghini's most prolific period in his career as an author and with his editorship of the journals, *Atanòr* (1924), *Ignis* (1925) and *Ur* (1926-7); the second, shorter, one will chronicle the Fascist regime's continuing flirtation with the Vatican, culminating in the Lateran Concordat of 1929, which declared Catholicism to be the official religion in Italy and dealt a final blow to the dreams and aspirations of all the Roman Traditionalists who had hoped for a rebirth of a Pagan Roman imperium.<sup>753</sup>

The chapter will begin with the analysis of Reghini's first published monograph, the 1922 *Le Parole Sacre e di Passo* (The Secret Words and Pass-Words):<sup>754</sup> in it Reghini poured all of his knowledge on Freemasonry and Pythagorean doctrines, compiling a history of Freemasonry more partisan to Roman Traditionalist positions, yet brimming with interesting intuitions and erudite conclusions. The book will be analysed as an attempt by Reghini to popularise Roman Traditionalist theories and ideas in the Italian masonic world, an effort which met

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<sup>752</sup> Il Gruppo dei Dioscuri, *Rivoluzione Tradizionale e Sovversione: Documenti per il Fronte della Tradizione 21* (Rome: Raido, 2004), p. 11.

<sup>753</sup> See Roberto Pertici, *Chiesa e Stato in Italia dalla Grande Guerra al Nuovo Concordato (1914-1984)* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2009); Yves Chiron, *Pio XI: Il Papa dei Patti Lateranensi e dell'Opposizione ai Totalitarismi* (Rome: San Paolo, 2006); Giovanni Sale, *La Chiesa di Mussolini* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2015).

<sup>754</sup> Arturo Reghini, *Le Parole Sacre e di Passo dei Primi Tre Gradi ed il Massimo Mistero Massonico: Studio Critico ed Iniziatico* (Todi: Atanòr, 1922).

with considerable success, if we are to believe the glowing reviews it received at the time of publication. The author's friendship with the owner of *Atanòr* publishing house, Ciro Alvi will also be discussed, as the collaboration between the two would allow Reghini the freedom to publish his journals with little or no censorship on Alvi's behalf: Alvi, a great enthusiast of anything occult, was a key figure in the dissemination of Roman Traditionalist ideas in the 1920s, and, besides Reghini, within that decade, also published other famous occultist personalities such as Eliphas Lévi, Ramon Lull (c.1232-c.1315) and Julius Evola.<sup>755</sup>

The following section will be devoted to the two journals *Atanòr* and *Ignis*, the two journals edited by Reghini, which were published in 1924 and 1925, respectively. Reghini's political and spiritual inclinations with the two journals were clear from the outset:

We too therefore wish to contribute to that increase of spiritual values, which has been much discussed about in Italy for some time, in good or bad faith, and alas mixing in it political considerations. Basing ourselves on the tradition and the Italian initiatic knowledge, we willed and foresaw fifteen years ago the fated advent of a regime and an Italian imperialist tendency. It was and is our deepest persuasion that such a regime must facilitate, favour and bring an increase of spiritual values, more so because, abandoning internal political issues, it is necessary for the West, meaning the Roman civil world, to assume with regards to the East the position it deserves in the spiritual domain too'.<sup>756</sup>

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<sup>755</sup> See the *Atanòr* catalogue *Atanòr 1912-2012*, ed. by Mariano Bianca (Rome: Atanòr, 2012).

<sup>756</sup> Arturo Reghini, 'Ai Lettori', *Atanòr* 1:1-2 (1924), pp.1-2: 'Anche noi dunque intendiamo contribuire a quell'incremento dei valori spirituali, di cui si parla tanto in Italia da qualche tempo in qua, in buona ed in mala fede, e mescolandovi purtroppo considerazioni di ordine politico. Basandoci sopra la tradizione e la conoscenza iniziatica italiana, noi volemmo e prognosticammo sin da quindici anni fa l'avvento fatale di un regime e di un indirizzo imperialistico italiano. Era ed è nostra profondissima persuasione che tale regime debba auspicare, favorire ed apportare un incremento dei valori spirituali, tanto più in quanto,

The many reasons for the short life-span of these journals will be discussed, as will the deterioration of the relationship between Reghini and Alvi.

Next, a fundamental part of the chapter, and of the thesis as a whole is going to be thoroughly analysed and discussed: the creation of the journal *Ur*, but especially the foundation of a very secret occult coterie comprising of many collaborators to the journal. While the journal, in many ways, followed the previous publications edited by Reghini on the outer, the secret activities of the Ur Group, aimed at magically supporting a Pagan imperialist stance on behalf of Mussolini's regime, will receive the utmost attention: the Ur Group was constituted by a veritable who's who in the Italian occult world of the day, and the attention devoted to it outside of Italian-speaking academic circles is minimal.<sup>757</sup> It is my intention to provide an exhaustive description of the group's membership, and, as far as has been researched so far, of its activities. Talking about *Ur*, both the journal and the magically active group, would not provide a complete picture of the status quo without a detailed research on the relationship between the three editors of the journal, namely Arturo Reghini, Julius Evola and Giulio Parise. During the years in which *Ur* was printed, both Reghini and Parise were forced to break their relationship with Julius Evola, for entirely different reasons. While Reghini resented Evola for publishing a book bearing the same title as his most popular work, *Imperialismo Pagano* (Heathen Imperialism, 1927), thus creating an inseparable rift between the two Traditionalists, Parise had begun a liaison with one of Evola's previous partners, prominent feminist author Sibilla Aleramo. In her popular autobiographical novel *Amo Dunque Sono*, constituted by letters written to Parise during one of his stays in Scalea, in Armentano's Talao tower, Aleramo speaks very lowly of Evola, thinly disguised by a pseudonym, and, as seen, also recounts an event in which the Sicilian Baron tried to rape her on a summer evening

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abbandonata la politica del piede di casa, diviene necessario far si che l'Occidente, ossia il mondo romanamente civile, prenda di fronte all'Oriente la posizione che gli compete anche nel campo spirituale'.

<sup>757</sup> The most complete account in the English language, as of now, is Hans Thomas Hakl, 'Julius Evola and the UR Group', *Aries* 12 (2012), pp. 53–90.

in Rome.<sup>758</sup> The break between the *Schola* and Evola was inevitable, and Reghini and Evola ended up going to court to settle their divergences.<sup>759</sup>

The last section will be devoted to the relationship between the Fascist regime and the Vatican, from the anticlerical positions held in 1923, through the long process of reconciliation, which culminated in 1929 with the Lateran Accords, which de facto made the Catholic faith the official Religion of the budding Fascist empire. The section will end with the sense of defeat and the apparent disbandment of the *Schola*, its activities fundamentally ceasing after 1929, and Reghini being *de facto* banned from teaching in public institutions due to his ties with Freemasonry.

The chapter will end with conclusions being drawn, and the relevance of each section being reappraised.

## **2. LE PAROLE SACRE DI PASSO PUBLISHED BY ATANÒR (1922)**

### **2.1. MEETING CIRO ALVI AND THE ATANÒR PUBLISHING HOUSE**

In a letter to his mentor Amedeo Armentano, dated 25 June 1914, after a meeting with Ciro Alvi (1872-1944), Reghini wrote:

Alvi is a good author and has been one of our fighters for idealism in these past fifteen years. We agreed upon everything. He too wants the Empire and the primacy of the Italians. [...]. To sum up he appeared to me as the person naturally closer to us than all the ones met so far. I invited him too to come and visit us in Scalea.<sup>760</sup>

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<sup>758</sup> See chapter 1 for the Aleramo's account of the event.

<sup>759</sup> See, *Arthos: Speciale Arturo Reghini* 20 (2012); Angelo Iacovella, 'Julius Evola e Arturo Reghini: un Sodalizio "Occulto"', in *Esoterismo e Fascismo*, pp. 155-161; Claudio Bonivecchio, 'La Polemica su Imperialismo Pagano', in Julius Evola, *Imperialismo Pagano* (Rome: Mediterranee, 2004), pp. 297-332; Giorgio, *Roma Renovata Resurgat*, 509-529.

<sup>760</sup> Sestito, *Figlio del Sole*, p. 107: 'Alvi é un buon scrittore ed é stato uno dei combattenti per l'idealismo in questi quindici anni. Ci siamo trovati d'accordo su tutto. Vuole l'Impero anche lui e il primato degli italiani. [...] Insomma mi é sembrata una persona più naturalmente vicina a noi di quante ne abbiamo incontrate sinora. Ho invitato anche lui a visitarci a Scalea'.

Biographical data on Alvi is very scarce.<sup>761</sup> he was born in the Umbrian town of Todi in 1872 and his family belonged to the local aristocracy. Although obtaining a degree in Law, his passion were the Latin and Greek classics, which would shape his view of the world drastically. He was a member of the Grand Orient of Italy from a very young age, although his name does not figure among the members and his highest degree achieved is to this day unknown.<sup>762</sup> Anticlerical and with strong socialist leanings, Alvi was forced to exile in Switzerland in the years 1898-9, after the socialist uprisings had been repressed. This seems to be a fundamental moment in Alvi's life, who abandoned his political activism and focused on his career as an author of novels and on his spiritual development. His first two books *Verso la Purificazione* (Towards Purification, 1899) and *La Via Nuova* (The New Way, 1901) suggest, even with their titles, to a spiritual yearning in the author's writing.<sup>763</sup> His following novel, *S. Francesco d'Assisi* (St. Francis of Assisi, 1903), possibly his most well-known work, was considered heretical for its strong anti-Christian sentiments, and was banned by the Catholic Church.<sup>764</sup> 'much discussed by critics, was published in more than one edition. It was banned'.<sup>765</sup> In 1911, along with his cousins Armando and Giorgio Comez, Alvi founded Atanòr, the publishing house that more than any other, in Italy, would strive to publish texts dealing with occultism, Freemasonry, Hermeticism and similar topics.<sup>766</sup> The publishing house was initially very successful and according to Bianca,

its founding, which represented the satisfaction of a need of  
the day's Italian culture, set itself within a wide cultural

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<sup>761</sup> Most of the data has been obtained from the Archivio Centrale dello Stato. Casellario Politico Centrale. Fascicolo 82: Alvi, Ciro, Scheda Biografica; Gianfranco de Turrís 'Il Gruppo di Ur: Tra Magia e Superfascismo', in *Abstracta* II:16 (1987), pp. 12-21.

<sup>762</sup> Both De Turrís and Baillet state that Alvi was not a Freemason, although Fabrizio Giorgio argues that the lodges in Umbria in his time were plenty, and one lodge in Todi actually did exist, although this does not really provide us with conclusive evidence: see Giorgio, *Roma Renovata Resurgat*, p. 314.

<sup>763</sup> Ciro Alvi, *Verso la Purificazione – Ricordi di un Mellonarca* (Todi: Armuzzi & Orsini Editori, 1899); Ciro Alvi, *La Vita Nuova – Il Culto dell'Avvenire* (Todi: self published, 1901).

<sup>764</sup> Ciro Alvi, *S. Francesco d'Assisi* (Milan: Sandron, 1903).

<sup>765</sup> 'molto discusso dalla critica, sono state fatte varie edizioni. Fu messo all'indice', Teodoro Rovito, *Letterati e Giornalisti Italiani Contemporanei: Dizionario Bio-Bibliografico*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Naples: Teodoro Rovito Editore, 1907), p. 10.

<sup>766</sup> See the exhaustive volume edited by Mariano Bianca, *Atanòr: 1912-2012*, especially 'La Fondazione della casa editrice Atanòr' pp. 23-25.



movement, promoted also by the strengthening and European consolidation of Freemasonry, of its institution and its thought, which also put great relevance on the esoteric and spiritual dimension which seemed to lose itself within the diffusion of science and positivist thought, or even more in the various religious doctrines and practices.<sup>767</sup>

Alvi, behind the wider scope of the diffusion of a vast array of esoteric subjects, was primarily focused on texts which would promote a Roman Imperialist view of the world, years before his first meeting with Reghini, dated 1912.<sup>768</sup> Reghini himself, in 1913, had established contact with Alvi and had intended to go to Todi, where he had recognised similar intents and ideas in Alvi's circle, before joining his mentor in Scalea.<sup>769</sup> The trip never manifested, but it is clear that the small Todi Roman Traditionalist milieu, which gravitated around Alvi, the Comez brothers and their publishing house, was on very similar political and spiritual positions as Armentano and his *Schola*, so that a meeting between the two groups seemed inevitable. Alvi's career as a novelist also seemed to take a Roman Traditionalist bend, especially in his *Per lo Spirito la Carne Esaltare* (To Exalt the Flesh for the Spirit, 1923), which I will deal with more thoroughly in the section devoted to the journal *Atanòr*.<sup>770</sup> The novel is a utopia, in which, the main characters, returning from a long voyage abroad, which had put them face to face with the most extreme consequences of modernity, come back to a new Imperialist Italy, which they barely recognize. The novel is filled with patriotic rhetoric and a feel that the restoration of the old aristocratic *mores* and Roman traditions was the best thing for Italy in its current state: 'The first citizens took care of public welfare, those favoured by the Gods, and only they were allowed

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<sup>767</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24: 'la sua fondazione, che rappresentò la soddisfazione di un'esigenza della cultura italiana dell'epoca, si collocò all'interno di un vasto movimento culturale, promosso anche dal rafforzamento e consolidamento europeo della Massoneria, delle sue istituzioni e del suo pensiero, che pose all'attenzione culturale quella dimensione esoterica e spirituale che sembrava sperdersi all'interno della diffusione della scienza e del pensiero positivista od ancora entro le diverse dottrine e pratiche religiose'.

<sup>768</sup> Fabrizio Giorgio, in my opinion, correctly identifies the character of Arturo Cemberli with Alvi himself, and Cemberli's desire to found an Imperialist party is coherent with the author's ideas: see Ciro Alvi, 'Aurea Atque Felix Italia', in *L'Arcobaleno* (Todi: Atanòr, 1912), pp. 23-32.

<sup>769</sup> Sestito, *Figlio del Sole*, p. 107

<sup>770</sup> Ciro Alvi, *Per lo Spirito la Carne Esaltare* (Todi: Atanòr, 1923).

to work for the material wealth of the modest'.<sup>771</sup> On the other hand, Alvi also seemed to share Reghini's repulsion towards Christianity, as can be clearly gleaned from reading his 1928 novel *L'Incendio di Roma* (The Fire of Rome): the story is based on the popular, now outdated theory that it was the Christians who started the fire that ravaged Rome on 18 and 19 July 64 AD.<sup>772</sup> An example, short and to the point, can be seen on page 29 of the work, when the Christian Apollonio tells his friend Fabio Gemino: 'Listen Fabio Gemino. Ponder on this. For us christians [sic.] Roma is the enemy, the abomination, it is the reign of Satan'.<sup>773</sup>

When Alvi agreed to publish Reghini's monograph, Alvi was writing Roman Traditionalism-inspired novels and Atanòr as a publisher was in full swing, publishing texts like ex-member of the *Rito Filosofico* Vittore Marchi's (1892-1981) *La Missione di Roma nel Mondo* (Rome's Mission in the World, 1915) and Enrico Caporali's (1838-1918) *La Sapienza Italica* (The Italic Wisdom, 1914-1916).<sup>774</sup> *Le Parole Sacre e di Passo* seemed to fit perfectly in this programme to promote Roman Traditionalism in all of its aspects. Finally the members of the *Schola* and Reghini in particular, appeared to have found a strong and far-reaching outlet for their Imperialist ideas.

## 2.2. LE PAROLE: REGHINI'S FIRST MONOGRAPH (1922)

In 1920, Alvi relocated his publishing house to Rome, the epicentre of the cultural and political ferment in the country: his most important publication within the subject of Freemasonry manifested in 1922, when, nine years after their first meeting,

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<sup>771</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 194.

<sup>772</sup> Ciro Alvi, *L'Incendio di Roma* (Todi: Atanòr, 1928); for theories on the 64 AD fire in Rome, see Publius Cornelius Tacitus, *Annales*, XV; for secondary sources, see Michael Gray-Fow, 'Why the Christians? Nero and the Great Fire', *Latomus* 57:3 (1998), pp. 595-616; Paul Keresztes, 'Nero, the Christians and the Jews in Tacitus and Clement of Rome', *Latomus*, 43:2 (1984), pp. 404-413; Edward Champlin, 'Nero Reconsidered', *New England Review* 19:2 (1998), pp. 97-108; monographs which probably influenced Alvi are Carlo Pascal, *L'incendio di Roma e i Primi Cristiani* (Turin: Loescher, 1900) and Attilio Profumo, *Le Fonti e i Tempi dell'Incendio Neroniano* (Rome: Forzani, 1905).

<sup>773</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29: 'Ascolta Fabio Gemino. Rifletti. Per noi cristiani Roma è la nemica, è l'abominio, è di Satana il regno'.

<sup>774</sup> Vittore Marchi, *La Missione di Roma nel Mondo* (Todi: Atanòr, 1915) and Enrico Caporali, *La Sapienza Italica*, 3 Vols. (Todi: Atanòr, 1914-6).

Alvi decided to publish Reghini's *Le Parole Sacre e di Passo*. As Fabrizio Giorgio has pointed out, 'it was certainly the shared faith in the pagan-imperialist ideals that drove Alvi to commit, in such a delicate political moment, a editorial venture so risky, that it exposed him and his publishing house'.<sup>775</sup> Perhaps, just like Armentano and Reghini, Alvi had realised that such a period of unrest was the best during which to push forward their imperialist agenda, and the March on Rome later that year, with its authoritarian bend, probably convinced him he was right. Reghini had begun writing his work during the summer stay at Scalea in 1919, and it was in 1921 that he met the man who was destined to become his prized disciple and early biographer: Giulio Parise (1902-1969).<sup>776</sup> Upon meeting him at the young age of nineteen, the young student Parise fondly remembers Reghini and his Spartan flat in Rome: 'I met A.R. when he was preparing his volume on 'The Sacred Words and Pass-Words and the Greatest Masonic Mystery', published in 1922. Back then, he lived in a modest room, where the most interesting thing apart from him was a small shelf containing his books [...]'.<sup>777</sup> His first copy of the book was obviously inscribed to his friend and master Amedeo Armentano, bearing the dedication: 'Dear Master, this book is the fruit of the work of you and me. I hope I will not have to do without your future guidance to complete another work even more worthy of you. Arturo Reghini'.<sup>778</sup> The reason behind my quoting other members of the *Schola Italica* is to underline the fact that, although the book was authored by Arturo Reghini only, it was only through a joint effort between master, disciple and publisher if the work came to have the importance it preserves even nowadays among Italian masons. The 1920s, in my opinion, were seen as the last possible attempt for the *Schola* to influence the cultural and political milieu of the capital to adopt a Pagan imperialist stance, and throughout

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<sup>775</sup> Giorgio, *Roma Renovata Resurgat*, Vol. I, p. 327: 'Fu sicuramente la medesima fede negli ideali imperialistico pagani che spinse Alvi ad intraprendere, in un momento politico così delicato, una avventura editoriale così rischiosa che esponeva lui e la sua casa editrice'.

<sup>776</sup> The most complete biographical work on Giulio Parise is without a doubt Simone Caltabellotta, *Un amore degli anni Venti.*; he also features prominently in Marco Rossi's articles 'L'interventismo politico-culturale delle riviste tradizionali degli anni Venti' and idem, 'Neopaganesimo e Arti Magiche nel Periodo Fascista', in: *Storia d'Italia, Annali 25, Esoterismo*, pp. 599-628.

<sup>777</sup> Parise, 'Nota' p. viii-ix: 'conobbi A.R. quando stave preparando il suo volume su 'Le Parole Sacre e di Passo ed il Massimo Mistero Massonico', pubblicato nel 1922. Abitava allora in una modesta stanza dove la cosa piu' interessante, dopo la sua persona, era uno scaffaletto con i suoi libri[...]'.  
<sup>778</sup> Sestito, *Figlio del Sole*, p 151: 'Caro Maestro, questo libro è frutto del lavoro tuo e mio. Spero non mi manchi il tuo aiuto futuro per poter compiere altra opera maggiormente degna di te. Arturo Reghini'.

the correspondence between Reghini and Alvi, or Reghini and Armentano, the consistent idea that the times were ripe for a final ‘now or never’ push of their ideas is an omnipresent feeling of urgency that permeates every communication: one example might be given by a letter a Pagan imperialist, Mario Gallinaro (nd.), who in a letter to Armentano expressed all of his excitement for Reghini’s work, while at the same time harbouring some doubts on the excess of the Florentine’s author proverbial caustic wit:

I very much enjoyed reading the book by our Arturo. There are pages of a real ingenious depth; as a whole, I consider it politically unmanageable since it would hurt many sensibilities, nay, all of them. Maybe it would have been better to smooth out some polemical asperities in the first edition and save them for a second volume, when the really superior authority of the author in the field of initiatic esotericism would not have become undoubted and undoubtable.<sup>779</sup>

What then is the content of Reghini’s book? It appears to me that within the author’s plan, the text is a continuous invitation to bring back Freemasonry to its primordial initiatic splendour. The *restitution ad pristinum*, a restoration according to the *mores* of the ancient Roman world has been a *fil rouge*, which has traversed every chapter of this thesis. Here Reghini makes a case for Freemasonry, which, since the *Rito Filosofico Italiano*, he had viewed as the best vehicle for the esoteric teachings of the *Schola Italica*: if the RFI had been a failure, mostly because of loose cannon Eduardo Frosini, *Le Parole* approached Freemasonry from a more general point of view.<sup>780</sup> The preface to the work opens with a programmatic quote from Niccolò Machiavelli’s (1469-1527) *Discorsi sulla Prima Deca di Tito Livio* (Discourses on the first Deca of Titus Livius, 1531), where Machiavelli argues that in order for a sect or a

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<sup>779</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 154-55: ‘Una vera gioia ho avuto dalla lettura del libro del nostro Arturo. Ci sono pagine di profondità veramente geniale; nell’insieme lo giudico politicamente inabile, in quanto urta molte suscettibilità, anzi tutte. Forse valeva meglio attenuare certe asprezze polemiche nella prima edizione e riservarle ad un secondo volume quando fosse stata indiscussa e indiscutibile l’autorità veramente superiore dello scrivente nel campo dell’esoterismo iniziatico.’

<sup>780</sup> For Eduardo Frosini and the Rito Filosofico debacle, please refer to chapter IV and VI.

republic to live long, it will often need to be brought back to its early state.<sup>781</sup> As we have seen, Machiavelli, along with Vergil, Dante and Mazzini, had been one of the champions of ‘Heathen Imperialism’, in what had been Reghini’s most successful article. The return to basics, in this case, is argued in favour of Freemasonry, which Reghini sees as corrupt, devoid of any initiatory qualities and too modern to do any candidate any good. In his preface, Reghini argues that

The analysis of the ceremonies and the ritual legends of the various degrees evidently shows the inspiration from the Pagan Mysteries, the Eleusynian and Isiaic especially, and Anderson’s constitutions faithfully maintain the healthy rationalist spirit which infused the Order with life at its very beginnings (1717) [...].<sup>782</sup>

The book is divided in five chapters: the first one deals with a philological analysis of the words; the second with the sacred words of the first and second degree; the third with the sacred word of the third degree; the fourth with the pass-words; the fifth with initiatic resurrection as the foundation of true Freemasonry; the appendix, much to the benefit of this chapter, deals with the then thorny issue of Freemasonry and Christianity.

From the outset of the first chapter, two things are readily apparent to the reader: Reghini’s vast erudition on the topic of Freemasonry and his desire, from the first page, to illustrate how Freemasonry, allegedly, is inextricably linked to the Pagan mysteries he so wants to bring masonic lore back to. Reghini, though using dated, or perhaps even out-dated sources for his research, still provides the reader with an array

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<sup>781</sup> Nicolò Machiavelli, *Degli Discorsi di Nicolò Machiavelli, Cittadino & Secretario Fiorentino, sopra la Prima Decade di Tito Livio a Zanobi Buondelmonti & a Cosimo Rucellai* (Florence: Bernardo Giunti, 1531), p. 145: ‘A volere che una setta o una repubblica viva lungamente, é necessario ritrarla spesso verso il suo principio’.

<sup>782</sup> Reghini, *Le Parole Sacre e di Passo*, p. ii: ‘L’analisi delle cerimonie e delle leggende rituali dei varii gradi mostra all’evidenza l’ispirazione dai Misteri pagani, gli Eleusini e gli Isiaci in specie, ed il libro delle costituzioni dell’Anderson fa fede del sano spirito razionalista che animava l’Ordine nei suoi storici primordii (1717) [...]’; for *The Constitutions of the Freemasons*, which established the rules adopted by the lodges in London and Westminster, see *The Constitutions of the Freemasons*, ed. by Rev. James Anderson (London: J. Senex & J. Hooke, 1723).

of scholarly theories that surpass, in finesse and philological clarity, those of any other Italian Freemason of his day: from Jean-Marie Ragon (1781-1862) to Gottfried Findel (1828-1905), from Eliphas Lévi to the Baron of Tschoudy (1727–1769), from Richard Hely-Hutchinson (1756-1825) to Samuel Pritchard (nd.), Reghini shows an outstanding grasp of the subject, chiding one author's gullibility one moment, and praising the philological work of another a couple of lines further down.<sup>783</sup> The second factor apparent is Reghini's motives for writing the book. Immediately, at the inception of the first chapter, he claims that along the words derived from an architectonic background, such are expected to be found in Freemasonry, 'it is easy to see within the Masonic lingo a number of words and sentences, whose symbolism retains a philosophical character that is deeper and more determined'.<sup>784</sup> His allusion is to the three Pass-words, which he believes are not Jewish in origin, although he does not contest the 'jewishness' of the sacred words Boaz, Jachin and Mac-benah, which are strictly correlated to the history of the Biblical building of the Temple of Solomon and linked closely with the legend of Hiram Abif: the mythical architect, who is entrusted with the construction of the temple, is slain by some of his disciples, as the third degree ritual of any masonic obedience recounts. It is the very slaying and resurrection of Hiram, which, according to Reghini, confirms the Pagan origin of Freemasonry:

Hiram dies and is reborn and in such a way becomes a Master. Similarly, Osiris, Dionysus, Jesus, were slain, proceeded down to hell, resurrected and became immortal.

Having attributed this kind of function to Hiram shows the evident intention to reconnect the Masonic initiation

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<sup>783</sup> The texts most used for his work throughout his work are certainly Jean-Marie Ragon, *Orthodoxie Maçonique* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1853); idem, *Cours Philosophic et Interpretatif des Initiations Anciennes et Modernes* (Paris: Berlandier, 1841); Gottfried Findel, *Histoire de la Francmaçonnerie*, II Vol. (Paris: Librerie Internationale, 1866); Eliphas Lévi, *Dogme*; William Hutchinson, *The Spirit of Masonry* (London: J. Wilkie & W. Goldsmith, 1775); Baron de Tschoudy, *L'Etoile Flamboyant – A l'Orient chez le Silence* (Paris: np., 1766); Samuel Pritchard, *Masonry Dissected* (London: J. Wilford, 1730).

<sup>784</sup> Reghini, *Le Parole Sacre*, p. 8: 'é agevole riconoscere nel frasario massonico un insieme di voci e di frasi il cui simbolismo ha un carattere pi profondo e determinato'.

to the classical ones, especially the isiac and eleusynian.<sup>785</sup>

To elucidate his point even further, Reghini reverts to examples in classical mythology, which may link to Hiram's story: the first mythological case tackled by the author is the legend of Aeneas's descent into the realm of the dead. Reghini likens the Trojan prince's necessity to procure a Golden Bough in order to be able to pass by the guardians of the netherworld to the Sprig of Acacia wood which is placed on Hiram's burial site:<sup>786</sup> the importance of the *Aeneid* as a sacred text of Roman Traditionalist lore and customs has been discussed before, as has the importance of Vergil as Dante's psychopomp.<sup>787</sup> Another myth, also found in Vergil, is that of the young Polidorus, killed by king Polymnestor because of the youth's wealth, and buried under a bush by a hillside: according to Vergil, Aeneas, while visiting Polymnestor, had accidentally snapped a branch from the bush, and the gruesome discovery of the body ensued.<sup>788</sup> Reghini thus concludes his second chapter by stating that the masonic

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<sup>785</sup> Reghini, *Le Parole Sacre*, p. 21: 'Hiram muore e risorge e diviene in tal modo un Maestro. Similmente Osiride, Dioniso, Gesù, venivano uccisi, discendevano agli inferi, resuscitavano e divenivano immortali. L'aver attribuito a Hiram una funzione di questo genere dimostra l'evidente intenzione di riallacciare l'iniziazione massonica a quelle classiche, la isiac e la eleusina in ispecie'.

<sup>786</sup> See Publius Vergilius Maro, *Aeneid*, Book VI, vv. 185-204: "O if now that golden bough would show itself to us on the tree in the deep wood! For all things truly – ah, too truly – did the seer say of you, Misenus." Scarce had he said these words when under his very eyes twin doves, as it chanced, came flying from the sky and lit on the green grass. Then the great hero knew them for his mother's birds, and prays with joy: "Be my guides, if any way there be, and through the air steer a course into the grove, where the rich bough overshadows the fruitful ground! And you, goddess-mother, fail not my dark hour!" So speaking, he checked his steps, marking what signs they bring, where they direct their course. As eyes could keep them within sight; then, when they came to the jaws of noisome Avernus, they swiftly rise and, dropping through the unclouded air, perch side by side on their chosen goal – a tree, through whose branches flashed the contrasting glimmer of gold'; on the masonic symbolism of the sprig of acacia, see Irène Mainguy, *La Symbolique Maçonnique du Troisième Millénaire*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Paris: Dervy Éditions, 2006 [2001]); Alain Pozarnik, *A la Lumière de l'Acacia* (Paris: Dervy Éditions, 2002); for an entheogenic approach to the role of Acacia in antiquity, see Benny Shanon, 'Biblical Entheogens: a Speculative Hypothesis in Time and Mind', *The Journal of Archaeology, Consciousness and Culture* I:1 (2008), pp. 51-74.

<sup>787</sup> See chapter 5.

<sup>788</sup> Vergil, *Aeneid*, Book III, vv. 19-68: 'By chance, hard by there was a mound, on whose top were cornel bushes and myrtles bristling with crowded spear shafts. I drew near, and essaying to tear up the green growth from the soil, that I might deck the altar with leafy boughs, I see an awful portent, wondrous to tell. For from the first tree which is torn from the ground with broken roots trickle drops of black blood and stain the earth with gore. A cold shudder shakes my limbs, and my chilled blood freezes with terror. Once more, from a second also I go on to pluck a tough shoot and probe deep the hidden cause; from the bark of the second also

mysteries have one central concept, which harkens back to the Mediterranean idea of the survival of the soul after death acquired through mystical death: 'it is the egyptian, orphic, pythagorean, hermetic idea; it is the main reason behind the mysteries of Eleusis, of Ceres, of Mithras[...].<sup>789</sup>

	1° grado	2° grado
parola sacra	Bohaz	Jakin
significato	attività, VIRTUS	passività, PATIENTIA
corrispon. cabalistica	י (jodh)	ב (beth)
simbolismo ideografico	verticale	— orizzontale
„ massonico	la perpendicolare	la livella
„ del tarocco	bastoni	coppe
corrispondenza fallica	φαλλός	κτείς (1)
„ astrolog.	sole	luna
„ alchemica	oro	argento
„ cosmogonica	fuoco	acqua
„ spirituale	vita	mortificazione
„ nelle cat. aristotel.	ποιεῖν, ἔχειν	πάσχειν, κελοῦν

A Table of Correspondences in *Le Parole Sacre e di Passo* © Atanòr

The third and fourth chapter will only be reviewed briefly, because a philological analysis of Hebrew words, does not concern us too deeply at this moment: Reghini's competence in dealing with ancient languages, though, must be pointed out. Whether discussing the ancient Hebrew suffixes of the words Boaz or Jakin, or trying

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follows black blood. Pondering much in heart, I prayed to woodland Nymphs, and father Gradivus, who rules over the Getic fields, duly to bless the vision and lighten the omen. But when with greater effort I assail the third shafts, and with my knees wrestle against the resisting sands – should I speak or be silent? – a piteous groan is heard from the depth of the mound, and an answering voice comes to my ears. 'Woe is me! why, Aeneas, do you tear me? Spare me in the tomb at last; spare the pollution of your pure hands! I, born of Troy, am no stranger to you; not from a lifeless stock oozes this blood. Ah! flee the cruel land, flee the greedy shore! For I am Polydorus. Here an iron harvest of spears covered my pierced body, and grew up into sharp javelins.' Then, indeed, with mind borne down with perplexing dread, I was appalled, my hair stood up, and the voice choked in my throat'.

<sup>789</sup> Reghini, *Le Parole Sacre*, p. 25: 'É l'idea egizia, orfica, pitagorica, ermetica; è la ragione precipua per i misteri di Eleusi, di Cerere, di Mitra[...]'.



to find Greek alternatives behind the sacred word Tubalcain, the author is at ease with Egyptian, Hebrew, Greek and Latin, and uses his knowledge to prove his main thesis. In sections of the text, his use of comparative tables and correspondences reminds the reader of Eliphas Lévi or Aleister Crowley and their attempt at synthesising occult lore. The graph, above, for example, is highly reminiscent of some tables charted by Crowley in his kabbalistic work *777*.<sup>790</sup> The central focus, the central drive of the book remains the same: to reconnect modern Freemasonry to the ancient Mediterranean mysteries: to do so, Reghini uses his wide knowledge of classical sources to point to similarities between the two, from Pherecydes of Syros (ca. 580 BC- ca. 520 BC) to Plutarch (46-127), from Pliny (29-79) to Catullus (84 BC -54 BC).<sup>791</sup> Of course, within his treatment of the subject of Freemasonry, Reghini manifested his usual dissatisfaction with the way occult secrets were approached, as is made abundantly clear from the following quote:

Nowadays it is thought that truth may be gained through discussion, and it seems natural that the pupil may put himself on a level with his master, arguing with him. With the prejudice of equality, and with its derivations: freedom, human rights, sovereign people, compulsory fraternity, economic utopias, etc. etc., every principle of authority has been undermined, every spiritual and intellectual superiority has been trivialised, hierarchy unknown or reversed, and deference and reverence to a master have vanished.<sup>792</sup>

The concepts of hierarchy, secrecy, elitism, a distancing of the higher individual from the plebeian mass of un-initiated people are a constant in Reghini's thoughts, and in *Le*

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<sup>790</sup> Aleister Crowley, *Liber 777 Vel Prolegomena Symbolica Ad Systemam Sceptico-Mysticam Viae Explicandae, Fundamentum Hieroglyphicum Sanctissimorum Scientiae Summae* (London: Walter Scott Publishing, 1909).

<sup>791</sup> Pherecydes and Plutarch are mentioned on p. 54, Pliny and Catullus on p. 73.

<sup>792</sup> Reghini, *Le Parole Sacre*, p. 105: 'Oggi si crede che la verità si possa raggiungere colla discussione, e sembra naturale che l'allievo si metta a tu per tu, a battibecco col suo maestro. Col pregiudizio dell'eguaglianza, e colle sue derivazioni: libertà, diritti dell'uomo, popolo sovrano, fratellanza obbligatoria, utopie economiche ecc. ecc., ogni principio di autorità è stato minato, ogni superiorità spirituale e intellettuale svalutata, la gerarchia misconosciuta od invertita, e la deferenza e la reverenza verso il maestro sono scomparse'.

*Parole* his attempt to re-sacralise Freemasonry has to be understood from the point of view of a man trying to involve a detached, antimodern readership, which had allegedly lost any contact with, or interest in, the sacred.

The fifth and closing chapter tries to sum up the theoretical apparatus that in the previous four sections had been mingled with philological analysis. It is a departure from the exquisitely rational study of the first four sections to a more mystical and spiritual exegesis of the central messages of Freemasonry. The chapter poses one fundamental question: are masonic rituals just innocuous ceremonial re-enactments with no spiritual value, or does the initiate go through a spiritual transformation, a mystical palingenesis, as it were, that the attendance to the ancient mysteries witnessed?<sup>793</sup> Although by now this appears to be a rhetorical question, Reghini goes to great lengths to convince the reader of the strength of his arguments. Initially, the author goes through examples of physical cases of apparent death and subsequent ‘return’ to life as a metaphor for death being just another state of being after life, ‘as night follows day, sleep is followed by awakening, winter by spring’.<sup>794</sup> He then goes back to the ancient mysteries and states that even then great ritual ceremonies were performed, but Reghini argues that these must have been ‘the only ones, which the great masses attended to’, and that the bigger ceremonies did not confer ‘those interior effects, which Apuleius and Plutarch talk about’.<sup>795</sup> The chapter

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<sup>793</sup> Reghini, *Le Parole Sacre*, p. 141.

<sup>794</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 147: ‘come la notte segue il giorno, il sonno dal ridestarsi, l’inverno dalla primavera’

<sup>795</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 167: ‘le sole cui partecipava la grande massa’; ‘quegli effetti interior di cui parlano Apuleio e Plutarco’. Lucius Apuleius Madaurensis (124-170) is the author of the *Golden Ass*, or *Metamorphosis*, the first Roman novel that has come to us preserved in its entirety, and narrates the account of a young man named Lucius, who is first tempted by magic spells and philtres, which turn him into a donkey, and his travels throughout Numidia. He regains his human shape by eating some rose petals consecrated to Isis, and therefore may evolve to human form again. See chapter 23: ‘I drew near to the confines of death, treading the very threshold of Proserpine. I was borne through all the elements and returned to earth again. At the dead of night, I saw the sun shining brightly. I approached the gods above and the gods below, and worshipped them face to face. See, I have told you things which, though you have heard them, you still must know nothing about. I will therefore relate only as much as may, without committing a sin, be imparted to the understanding of the uninitiate’. Plutarch, in his *Περὶ τῶν Ἐκλελοιπότων Χρηστηρίων*, or *On the Failure of Oracles*, talks about the ancient mysteries, and admits to having participated to an initiation, and that he may not disclose the secrets learnt under penalty of death. See 422c. where Plutarch also writes, ‘Opportunity to see and to contemplate these things is vouchsafed to human souls once in ten thousand years if they have lived goodly lives; and the best of the initiatory rites here are but a dream of that highest rite and initiation’.

then goes onto undermining the authority of other occultist groups' claim to possess the keys to access the sacred and that of scientists, who belittle the benefits of 'real' initiation. In the first instance, Reghini complains that occultists have cropped up like proverbial weeds in early-twentieth century Italy: he lists 'freemasons, rosicrucians, templars, gnostics, hermetists, kabbalists, astrologers, alchemists, theosophists, anthroposophists', concluding that with such an abundance of true initiates 'within a couple of decades they will all be initiates!'<sup>796</sup> Reghini, here, is clearly staking his ground, and that of the *Schola*'s, as the only true repository of initiatic knowledge, which can be traced back to antiquity. The validation by antiquity to which he invests his reformed version of Freemasonry is clearly different from all other masonic obediences, since Freemasons are the first in the list quoted above that the author lampoons. Modern Freemasons are no more than members of an exclusive club in the eyes of Reghini, and the democratization of occultism is to blame for the situation at hand. The chapter, and the book, close with a warning to the second group of people Reghini wishes to attack, those who prefer to explain every phenomenon through science, the rationalists, the believers in progress:

We could allow you to experience, if you ever wished so, one of the feelings spoken about by Apuleius and Plutarch; and we'll content ourselves with laughing at you when at the first tottering of *your* psyche you will give manifest signs of having understood that the open waters of the seafarers is no route for small boats.<sup>797</sup>

The appendix entitled Freemasonry and Christianity (Massoneria e Cristianesimo) does not share the same dialectic vigour of the rest of the work, although it does fit in with the increasing anticlerical stance taken by Reghini in the 1920s. Very briefly, it represents a call to arms for Freemasons all around Italy to unite against the increasing power of the clergy: after accusing British Freemasonry of

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<sup>796</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 193: 'frammassoni, i rosacroce, i templari, gli gnostici, gli ermetisti, i cabalisti, gli astrologhi, gli alchimisti, i teosofi, gli antroposofi' and 'tra qualche decennio saranno tutti iniziati!'

<sup>797</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 208: 'In cambio vi faremo sperimentare, se ve ne venisse voglia, qualcheduna delle sensazioni di cui parlano Apuleio e Plutarco; e ci contenteremo di ridere quando al primo traballare della *vostra* psiche darete manifesti segni di avere capito che il mare aperto dei naviganti non é pilleggio da piccioletta barca'.

being completely corrupted by Christianity ‘so far that it takes the form of one of the many protestant sects that take hold there’, Reghini urges Italian Freemasons to unite against the greater evil, ‘if we do not want to leave the Order and the country at the mercy of Christianity’.<sup>798</sup> The appendix, in essence, ideally represents the thread that runs through this entire chapter: horrified by the idea of Christianity gaining more and more influence since its loss of temporal power in 1870, Reghini urges Freemasons, which he still sees as the group least corrupted by religion and the malaise of modernity, to join him in a return to the sources of initiation, the Pagan mysteries, and therefore bring Italy back to a position of pre-eminence in both the spiritual and political domain. After having tainted men through the institution of the Young Men’s Christian Associations and the Salvation Army, Reghini points his finger towards Christian Science, New Thought and his repudiated alma mater, the Theosophical Society.<sup>799</sup> All these institutions have worsened the spiritual condition of English occultists and freethinkers because of their ‘anglo-saxon superidealism’. Christianity, Reghini argues, which has broken through the British occult milieu, but the same thing will not happen to Italy:

But we are pagan; [a]nd we remind the Italian freemasons once again that masonic science has nothing to do with the religion of Jesus, or any other; it is instead the same wisdom that classical civilization cherished and transmitted through its sacred mysteries.<sup>800</sup>

As Reghini’s first monograph, the work can be said to have been written in a clear and concise matter: to the reader of previous material written by the author, the themes are definitely not new, and the same motifs are repeated again throughout the work: the value of Freemasonry as a vehicle of Traditional transmission; the origins of Freemasonry to be found in the ancient mystery cults; the aim of all esoteric endeavors within Freemasonry, namely palingenesis and self-deification. These three points,

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<sup>798</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 212-3: ‘si da assumere quasi l’aspetto di una delle tante sette protestanti che ivi allignano’ and ‘se non si vuole consegnare l’Ordine e il paese alla mercè del cristianesimo’.

<sup>799</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 228.

<sup>800</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 228-9: ‘Ma noi siamo pagani; ed ai massoni italiani ricordiamo ancora una volta che la scienza massonica non ha nulla a che fare colla religione di Gesù, o con qualsiasi altra; ed invece è la stessa sapienza che la civiltà classica custodiva e perpetuava nei sacri misteri’.

along with a superb philological analysis made by the author on the words themselves, have prompted Reghini biographer and masonic researcher di Luca to state that ‘Reghini has been the first author in Italy to discuss, with knowledge of the sources, of this subject and of authors like Hutchinson, Hawkins, Mackey, Findel, Preston, Tschoudy, Thory, de Bonville, Oliver, Pike [...]’.<sup>801</sup>

### 3. THE JOURNALS *ATANÒR* (1924) AND *IGNIS* (1925).

#### 3.1. REGHINI’S FIRST JOURNAL: *ATANÒR*.

By 1924, the *Atanòr* publishing house had established itself as the major distributor of books related to Freemasonry and occultism: in a review of Reghini’s *Le Parole Sacre*, an anonymous journalist had playfully written: ‘This work of our terrible friends Arturo Reghini, author, and Ciro Alvi, publisher, scares us like the many others published by the wizard of Umbria. Which was a green [land], but with so many fumigation must have, by now, become smoky-black’.<sup>802</sup> It did not take much on Reghini’s behalf to convince Alvi to publish a monthly magazine dedicated to the esoteric, with a particular focus on the Italic tradition, which both Reghini and Alvi felt the need to promote most. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Reghini had already written to his teacher Armentano about the necessity of propagating their ideas through a journal, but by 1924 the magus of Scalea seemed to have more pressing concerns at hand: the scandal created by his marriage to his extremely young niece Giselda Perrone, during one of his trips to Brasil in 1921 and the crash of his revenue from the land he owned, due to the post-war economic crisis, forced Armentano to seek refuge in Brasil, where rich relatives were ready to take care of the Italian side of the family.<sup>803</sup> On the 3 May of 1924, Amedeo and Giselda Armentano left Italy for

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<sup>801</sup> di Luca, *Reghini*, p. 67: ‘Reghini è stato il primo in Italia a discutere, con cognizione di prima mano, di questi materiali e di autori come lo Hutchinson, lo Hawkins, il Mickey, il Findel, il Preston, lo Tschoudy, il Thory, il de Bonneville, l’Oliver, il Pike etc. [...]’.

<sup>802</sup> Anonymous, ‘Recensione de *Le Parole Sacre* e di *Passo e del Massimo Mistero Massonico*’, in *Cronache d’Attualità*, 6:6-10 (1922), p.82, quoted in Marco Rossi, ‘Neopaganesimo e Arti Magiche nel Periodo Fascista’, in *Storia d’Italia*, pp. 599-627: ‘Quest’opera dei nostri tremendi amici Arturo Reghini, autore, e Ciro Alvi, editore, ci raccapriccia come molte di quelle pubblicate dal mago dell’Umbria. La quale era verde, ma con tanti suffumigi sarà, oramai, diventata nerofumo’.

<sup>803</sup> For biographical news on Armentano between the years 1919-1924, see Giuseppe Armentano, ‘Gli Anni piu’ Difficili: 1919-1924’ in Armentano, *Massime*, pp. 91-101; due to

what should have been a relatively short stay in South America, but which ended up being a one way trip. Reghini took it upon himself, therefore, to carry on with the divulgation of the *Schola's* idea, and a journal seemed like the perfect medium to address the various issues most pressing to the Roman Traditionalists: after all, as expert on Italian journals of the time Marco Rossi has written, 'there existed an ambiguous and yet organic link between the spiritual and cultural research of the artistic avant-gardes, the milieu of esoteric Freemasonry and the origins of the fascist movement'.<sup>804</sup> Thus, through Alvi's publishing house, 1924 saw the publication of nine issues (three double issues) of *Atanòr: Rivista di Studi Iniziatici* (*Atanòr: Journal of Initiatic Studies*). The editorial board was composed of a veritable who's who in the esoteric Italian milieu of the day: in addition to Ciro Alvi, Arturo Reghini and his recently-found disciple Giulio Parise, we can read the names of René Guénon, Giuliano Kremmerz, Julius Evola, anthroposophist Aniceto del Massa, Armando Comes, Amedeo Armentano and Alberto Russo Frattasi, all of whom have been mentioned before within this dissertation. The presence of Kremmerz and Frattasi on the editorial board is purely nominal, as they do not seem to have been involved in any of the nine issues published: it is my idea that Reghini simply wanted to gather all established esoteric thinkers who were in line with his Italic theories of magical primacy, in order to be able to better focus on the inevitable attacks of other occultist groups, the Theosophical Society or the Martinist Order *in primis*. Generally speaking, the articles and columns in *Atanòr* may be divided into three categories: it is my arbitrary subdivision in order to better elucidate the issues tackled by the various authors, not something readily apparent to the reader of the journal. The first group of writings concerned themselves to the promulgation of the Pythagorean and Italic ideals of the *Schola Italica*, and clearly made use of the journal as a vehicle for esoteric knowledge towards people who already had a vague idea of occultist and Traditionalist themes; secondly we have the articles, which most times seem to be talking about esoteric themes, but are truly reflections and comments on the political situation of the day: such articles are mostly penned by Reghini and are directed either to the Christian Church or to Benito Mussolini and his regime; thirdly, *Atanòr* also

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a law against marriage between blood relations in Brasil, the wedding had to be organised hastily in Montevideo, Uruguay.

<sup>804</sup> See Rossi, 'Neopaganesimo', p. 600; idem, 'L'interventismo politico-culturale', pp. 457-504; also see chapter 3 of this thesis, on Avant-garde and Tradition.

contains many personal attacks to the exponents of other occult movements, chiefly the Theosophical and Martinist ones: although Reghini's pen is definitely mightier than the sword and it may seem that he is writing such articles for the amusement of the authors and his readers, it will become readily apparent that his tactic of using ridicule aimed at establishing his neo-Pythagorean ideas as valid and discrediting those of the other movements, which were in those days fashionable.

The most important group of articles, from the point of view of the scholar of Roman Traditionalism, is without doubt the first: right from the first editorial of the first issue, 'Ai Lettori' ('To the Readers'), Reghini is direct and clearly states the intents of the newly founded journal.<sup>805</sup> The theme covering the majority of the articles deals with 'the Italian tradition, from Pythagoras to our days' and its core goal is to provide the diffusion of such ideas without preference to a particular religion or occult system: '[t]o the hunger for the new, the original the wonderful, [the journal] will prefer the examination of facts and the ascertainment of truth old or new'.<sup>806</sup> The double 'warfront' against science and religion is postulated at the end of Reghini's first article, when he clearly states he is arguing both against science and religion:

We cannot accept the claim of those religions or beliefs which think they can subtract to science and claim from faith the dominion of spiritual enquiry. Neither can we agree with the abdications of a science which wants to arbitrarily exclude from the field of scientific experience the spiritual experiences, neither the unreasonable obstinacy in wanting to necessarily impose in this field criteria and methods which are not functional, subordinating the subject in need of study to a system of enquiry and vice-versa.<sup>807</sup>

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<sup>805</sup> Reghini 'Ai Lettori', *Atanòr* 1:1-2 (1924), 1-3.

<sup>806</sup> *Ibid.*, p.1: 'con speciale riguardo alla tradizione italiana, da Pitagora ai nostri tempi'; 'Alla smania pel nuovo, l'originale, il meraviglioso, preferirà l'esame dei fatti e l'appuramento della verità vecchia o nuova'.

<sup>807</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3: 'Non possiamo ammettere la pretesa di quelle religioni e credenze che presumono sottrarre alla scienza ed avocare alla fede il dominio dell'indagine spirituale. Né possiamo ammettere le abdicazioni di una scienza che vuole arbitrariamente escludere dal campo dell'esperienza scientifica le esperienze spirituali, né l'irragionevole ostinazione che

This method of approach to spiritual knowledge is reflected nowadays in the theory of diversification of religion, science and gnosis (spiritual first-hand knowledge) brought forward by many scholars in the field of Western esotericism: to cite but one, Wouter J. Hanegraaff. In his *Western Esotericism: A Guide for the Perplexed* (2013), Hanegraaff devotes a chapter to the concept of knowledge, which he divides into products of reason, faith and gnosis.<sup>808</sup> He then proceeds to illustrate two characteristics that pertain to all three groups of knowledge considered: communicability and testability of the knowledge gained. While scientific knowledge, therefore, is both communicable and testable, and religion is definitely communicable but inevitably not testable, gnosis, or direct access to a higher state of knowledge, is neither transmittable nor testable.<sup>809</sup> The theme of the journal *Atanòr*, then, are those systems, which provide the individual a personal, unmediated access to ‘divine’ knowledge: the journal doesn’t aim at explaining states of gnosis, because it is impossible to do so, yet Reghini, as Hanegraaff, ninety-nine years later, thought of the distinction between science, faith and italic Pythagorean gnosis, as a paramount division to present the readers with right from the outset.

	Communicable	Testable
Reason	+	+
Faith	+	-
Gnosis	-	-

*Western Esotericism: A Guide for the Perplexed*, p. 89, © Bloomsbury.

Other major articles, which in my opinion belong into this category, are René Guénon’s: some of his works, thanks to Reghini’s diligent translations, would be printed in Italy before their publication in France, and such articles constituted the core writings for every issue of *Atanòr*. Besides, having Guénon on board, provided the

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vuole per forza imporre in questo campo criteri e metodi inadatti, subordinando l’argomento da studiare al sistemadi indagine e non viceversa’.

<sup>808</sup> Wouter J. Hanegraaff, ‘Knowledge’, in *Western Esotericism: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), pp. 86-101.

<sup>809</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 89 [86-101].



journal with a more universalistic approach to the subject matter, in my opinion making the journal as a whole more interesting for a wider audience: the first attempts at this can be seen already in the first issue in his ‘L’Insegnamento Iniziatico’ (‘Initiatic Teaching’), where Guénon argues that there can be no two identical initiations, and no two identical initiates.<sup>810</sup> In his eyes, ‘the unity and immutability of the principle do not require unity and immutability, which would be impossible to realise, of the exterior forms[...].’<sup>811</sup> In other words, Guénon opens to a plurality of approaches to the sacred, not limited, as in Reghini’s case, to the Italic mysteric way, in this way paving the way for a generation of Traditionalists after him, such as Frithjof Schuon (1907-1997), whose first work would be programmatically titled *The Transcendent Unity of Religion* (1952).<sup>812</sup> The other articles by Guénon, already discussed in detail in the previous chapter are ‘L’Esoterismo di Dante’ (‘Dante’s Esotericism’) and ‘Il Re del Mondo’.<sup>813</sup> Reghini’s contribution is predictably much more specific in its subject matter: his first writing on esoteric subjects is entitled ‘L’Impronta Pitagorica nella Massoneria’ (Pythagorean Imprint in Freemasonry’).<sup>814</sup> Here Reghini makes use of his mastery of both mathematics and Pythagorean philosophy, showing links between, states of being, numbers, musical notes and stages in masonic initiation: the reading is not of the easiest, but if the editors of the journal wanted to keep the standards of the articles high, then Reghini’s first contribution can be considered as a convoluted but ingenious introduction to modern neo-Pythagorean theories and their links to the degrees of Freemasonry. Of course, there are more easily approachable writings, such as Aniceto del Massa’s ‘Palingenesi e Reincarnazione’ (Palingenesis and Reincarnation), in which the contributor goes through all the theories of reincarnation in the pre-Socratic West and the East, focusing then on Pythagoras’s idea on the topic, quoting Aristoxenus (c. 375 BC – 335 fl. BC):

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<sup>810</sup> René Guénon, ‘L’Insegnamento Iniziatico’, *Atanòr* I:1-2, pp. 12-18.

<sup>811</sup> Guénon, ‘L’Insegnamento Iniziatico’, *Atanòr* 1:1-2 (1924), pp. 12-18 [17]: ‘L’unità e l’immutabilità del principio non esigono affatto l’unità e l’immobilità, dall’altra parte irrealizzabile, delle forme esteriori [...]’.

<sup>812</sup> Frithjof Schuon, *The Transcendent Unity of Religions* (Varanasi: Indica Books, 2005 [1952]).

<sup>813</sup> ‘L’Esoterismo di Dante’, *Atanòr* spans through issues I:4, pp.103-116; I:5, pp. 140-145; I:7, pp. 193-201; I:8-9, pp. 252-267; ‘Il Re del Mondo’, *Atanòr* can be found on issue I:12, pp. 353-370.

<sup>814</sup> Arturo Reghini, ‘L’Impronta Pitagorica nella Massoneria’, *Atanòr* I:1-2, pp. 31-46; I:7 pp. 210-219 and I:8-9, pp. 268-275.

For the Pythagoreans the aim of man is to become similar to God. The key to the Pythagorean system is to follow God [...]. The authority of Aristotle allows us to say that Pythagoreans divided rational living things in Gods, men and similar to Pythagoras.<sup>815</sup>

The article, of course, quoted the final couplet in Pythagoras's *Golden Verses*, where man is promised immortality: 'And when, after having deprived yourself of your mortal body, you arrived at the most pure Aither, you shall be a God, immortal, incorruptible, and Death shall have no more dominion over you'.<sup>816</sup>

The second section, as anticipated above, deals with Reghini's turbulent relationship with the Catholic Church and Mussolini's regime. The articles are, most of the time, thinly disguised as esoteric in nature, but more than often Reghini's lack of subtlety in his invectives gives the game away from the get-go. In the third issue of the journal, after pressures by colleagues in the *Schola Italica*, Reghini decided to republish his most famous article 'Imperialismo Pagano', ('Heathen Imperialism'), which was deemed to be very revealing for the current times, ten years after its first publication.<sup>817</sup> Reghini, nevertheless, didn't think a mere re-publication of the article would be enough, and penned an introduction to the article, to make it even more in line with 'current' events. In it, he spared no blows towards the Church. Talking about a change of attitude toward modern contraptions in politics and religion, which would favour a spiritual approach, Reghini writes:

Neither is such a question without importance even from a political point of view, especially when one talks or thinks about imperial politics and one may wish to set the country in motion towards a spiritual revolution and not only a mercantile one. And one would be wise to think

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<sup>815</sup> Aniceto del Massa, 'Palingenesi e Reincarnazione', *Atanòr* I:8-9, p. 231 [221-236]: 'Per i Pitagorici scopo dell'uomo é di divenire simile a Dio. La chiave del sistema pitagorico é il seguire Dio [...].L'autorità di Aristotile ci permette di asserire che i Pitagorici dividevano le cose razionali viventi in Dei, uomini e simili a Pitagora'.

<sup>816</sup> Pythagoras, *Golden Verses*, ed. by Florence M. Firth (San Francisco: Theosophical Publishing House, 1904), vv. 70-71.

<sup>817</sup> Reghini, 'Imperialismo Pagano', pp. 69-85.

about this especially when the official religion, lacking or forgetful of initiatic wisdom, usurps on earth my empty space, as Dante used to say talking about Papacy, leaving Italy and the West, at least as far as appearances go, in a position of spiritual inferiority.<sup>818</sup>

An example of a more direct attack to the Head of State was Reghini's one page article 'Campidoglio e Golgota' ('Capitol Hill and Golgotha', 1924), in which Mussolini appeared to be dangerously close, in Reghini's eyes, to the ideals of the Catholic Church.<sup>819</sup> While exalting the qualities of ancient Rome and the return of Fascism to such a golden age for Italy, Mussolini pronounced the sentence that incensed Reghini: 'The Capitol Hill' he said '**after the Golgotha**, is certainly from centuries back the most sacred [hill] for civilized people'.<sup>820</sup> Outraged, Reghini had written in response that 'we refuse to subordinate to an Asian hillock the sacred mound of the Capital Hill', remembering how his concept of empire harmonized with names by now familiar to the reader: Vergil, Dante, Frederick II and Nicholas of Cusa.<sup>821</sup> In 'Morale e Peccato', ('Morals and Sin', 1924), the opening article to the sixth issue of *Atanòr*, Reghini launches a full frontal attack against the Church.<sup>822</sup> The crux of the problem, according to Reghini, is that while under Pagan religion many different creeds managed to coexist peacefully, Christianity and Jewry are nefarious for a peaceful coexistence between different people:

Christian religion, which derives from the Jewish essentially a *political* one, changing territory has made itself *apolitical* or *non-political*. While in Rome the attack on religion meant an attack on the State, in christian

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<sup>818</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70: 'Né simile questione é priva di importanza anche dal punto di vista politico, soprattutto quando si parli o si pensi ad una politica imperiale e si voglia avviare un paese ad una grandezza spirituale e non soltanto mercantile. Ed in particolar modo sarebbe savio pensarvi quando la religione ufficiale, priva o dimentica della sapienza iniziatica, usurpa in terra il loco mio che vaca, come diceva Dante parlando del Sommo Pontificato, lasciando L'Italia e l'Occidente, almeno in apparenza, in una posizione di inferiorità spirituale'.

<sup>819</sup> Arturo Reghini, 'Campidoglio e Golgota', *Atanòr* 1:5, p. 146.

<sup>820</sup> *Ibid.*, p.148: 'Il colle del Campidoglio' egli ha detto '**dopo il Golgota è certamente da secoli il più sacro alle genti civili**'.

<sup>821</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 148: 'Noi ci rifiutiamo di subordinare ad una collinetta asiatica il sacro colle del Campidoglio'.

<sup>822</sup> Reghini, 'Morale e Peccato', *Atanòr* 1:6, pp. 161-170.

countries one thinks that the Church may be separate from the state and this has a jealous theory of supremacy over the state.<sup>823</sup>

### 3.2. *IGNIS*

The economic problems plaguing Ciro Alvi and his publishing house put a halt on the publication of *Atanòr*, which thus had a lifespan of exactly one year, from January to December 1924.<sup>824</sup> undeterred, Reghini launched another journal in 1925, *Ignis*, which bore very little differences compared to *Atanòr*. *Ignis* had less collaborators, but this granted Reghini to write the majority of the articles, therefore proposing a more homogeneous set of articles, and spared him financial expenses, which he probably could not afford. In his opening article ‘Ai Lettori’ (‘To the readers’), Reghini explained that only ‘the title and the postal address’ had changed compared to his previous revue, and that the new journal was to deal solely with initiatic studies, abandoning the previous focus on politics and religion.<sup>825</sup> if he did keep his word on the first point, the precipitous events in 1925 Italy made sure Reghini would also deal with the two subjects he had declared taboo. Reghini’s writings appear in *Ignis* under his real name and under the pseudonyms *Maximus* and *Il Vicario di Satana* (Satan’s Vicar), while the few who collaborated included his disciple Giulio Parise, Aniceto del Massa, Julius Evola and, to a lesser degree, René Guénon. Thus, while the link between Pythagoreanism and Freemasonry was not inquired into any further by Reghini, he devoted himself to the study and rediscovery of some lesser known alchemists, Masons and occultists: his studies on Cagliostro or Oswald Crollius (1563-1603), for example, were the first to seriously tackle these figures in a professional and scholarly way, and these articles, appeared in the early issues, were followed by

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<sup>823</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 162: ‘La religion cristiana che deriva da quella ebraica essenzialmente *politica*, cambiando territorio si é fatta *apolitica* e magari *impolitica*. Mentre a Roma attaccare la religion significava attaccare lo stato, nei paesi cristiani si pens a che lo stato possa anche essere una cosa separata dalla Chiesa e quesra ha una sua gelosa teoria di supremazia sullo stato’.

<sup>824</sup> In a letter to Armentano, published in the reprint of *Ignis* (Associazione Culturale Ignis, ‘Presentazione’, in *Ignis*, ed. by Arturo Reghini, pp. 7), Reghini had confessed that Alvi’s lack of reliability had engraged the Florentine philosopher, his Florentine dialect words being, ‘Alvi mi ha fatto ingrullire’, roughly translatable to ‘Alvi drove me crazy’.

<sup>825</sup> Arturo Reghini, ‘Ai Lettori’, *Ignis* 1:1-2 (1925), pp. 1-3 [1]: ‘il titolo e l’indirizzo postale’.

thorough research on Alexander Seton (1555-1622) and his alleged disciple Michael Sendivogius (1566-1636).<sup>826</sup> Reghini's studies on such figures, just like his detailed research on the works of Agrippa, Bruno and Campanella, put Reghini in a position to predate scholars like Garin and Kristeller, who would only tackle the subjects of esotericism during the Renaissance almost two decades later: it is true that Reghini sometimes was prone to emic blunders, which happened when he tried to link his school to such authors, but overall the rigorousness of Reghini's research in his writings was, at the time, something new, captivating and appreciated by members of the occult community.<sup>827</sup> Julius Evola, now aged twenty-seven, began to make his mark on the journals of the day, and contributed to *Ignis* with articles containing his typical dry wit and his remoteness and disdain for what he considered to be lower forms of initiates: the two articles that most represent this phase of Evola's life are the infamous 'La Donna come Cosa' ('Woman as a Thing') and 'Che cosa vuole l'Antroposofia di Steiner' ('What Steiner's Anthroposophy Wants').<sup>828</sup> In his first article his demolition of womanhood is jarring: in the introduction he states that 'her substance is purely negative – not living for herself [...], but for the death of perfect life – for the decomposition and impurity – she is contingent to herself'.<sup>829</sup> Later, cast aside all philosophical jargon, Evola makes his misogyny clear to all readers:

Experience shows that only passion has made possible whatever woman used to elevate herself from an amorphous and obtuse life. The same female mysticism is mostly justifiable with a deviated or repelled sensuality.. which explains the fact – noticed by many authors – of the absolute mediocrity (not to say inexistence) of feminine works in

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<sup>826</sup> See Arturo Reghini, 'Cagliostro in Documenti Inediti del Santo Uffizio', *Ignis* 1:1-2 (1925), pp. 14-27; the article carried on in *Ignis* 1:3, pp. 79-83; idem, 'Una Pagina Ermetica e Cabalistica di Osvaldo Crollio', *Ignis* 1:1-2 (1925), pp. 47-63; idem, 'Brevi Note sul Cosmopolita e i suoi Scritti' *Ignis* 1:3 (1925), pp. 82-88; carried on in *Ignis* 1:4-5, pp. 127-143.

<sup>827</sup> In Sestito, *Figlio del Sole*, p. 155, Mario Gallinaro, close friend of Armentano's, thus commented on Reghini's research in a letter dated 20 October 1922: 'Reghini must write for his and our gain; few have his clarity of ideas, his vastness of culture, and his sure grip on the Italian language, vigorous and certain'.

<sup>828</sup> Julius Evola, 'La Donna come Cosa', *Ignis* 1:1-2, pp. 18-29; idem, 'Che cosa vuole l'Antroposofia di Steiner', *Ignis* 1:6-7, pp. 185.

<sup>829</sup> Evola, 'La Donna', p. 18: 'La sua sostanza è affatto negativa – non vivendo per sé stessa [...] bensì per la morte della vita perfetta – per la decomposizione e l'impurità, essa è a sé medesima contingente[...]'

domains such as science, philosophy, the creation of religions etc.. which imply a principle of mediation and of positive initiative.<sup>830</sup>

In his article on Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925), on the year of the German founder of Anthroposophy's death, Evola is, as usual scathing: 'it is a distortion and flawed understanding of eastern wisdom, made worse, comparing it to theosophy proper (Blavatsky), one the one hand from christian prejudice, on the other from what worse there is in the West, that is to say a positivist-empirical and progressive-humanitarian mentality'.<sup>831</sup> For these articles to be published in *Ignis*, they must have certainly have been read by the editor prior to printing: it is therefore possible that Reghini, although never writing about it, felt the same in regards to gender equality, although it must be said he had specified within his preface 'Ai Lettori', in the first issue, that the editor was only responsible for the general direction the journal would take and not of the content of the contributor's articles.

Halfway through 1925, though, Reghini had to forego his promise not to talk about religion or politics: the events, sometimes violent, leading to the Bodrero bill necessitated Reghini's attention: in the June/July double issue, in the rubric *Associazioni Vecchie e Nuove* (Associations Old and New), Reghini railed against Mussolini's law against secret societies of 16 May 1925.<sup>832</sup> Reghini's article is entirely aimed against the Head of State and Bodrero's superficial definition of 'masonic institutions' accused of promoting 'a doctined inspired by a kind of mystic rationalism, which, absurd in itself, is what is more antithetical one can imagine to the

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<sup>830</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19: 'L'esperienza mostra che soltanto la passione ha reso possibile ciò in cui la donna si è elevata da una vita amorfa ed ottusa. Lo stesso misticismo femminile è in massima parte giustiziabile con della sensualità deviata o refoulée.. Il che spiega il fatto – notato da tanti autori – dell'assoluta mediocrità (per non dire nullità) dell'opera femminile in quelle categorie in quelle categorie quali la scienza, la filosofia, la creazione di religioni ecc.. che implicano un principio di mediazione e positiva iniziativa'.

<sup>831</sup> Evola, 'Che cosa vuole', p. 185: p. 'si tratta di una deformazione e di una comprensione imperfetta di elementi della sapienza orientale, aggravata, di contro alla teosofia propriamente detta (Blavatsky) – da una parte dal pregiudizio cristiano, dall'altra da ciò che vi è di più deteriore in Occidente, v.d. da una mentalità positivo-empiristica e progressistico-umanitaria'.

<sup>832</sup> Maximus [Arturo Reghini], 'Associazioni Vecchie e Nuove', *Ignis* 1:6-7 (1925): pp. 211-224.

fundamental character of the Italian sentiment and thought'.<sup>833</sup> Reghini clarified his position and that of his companions in a long passage worth quoting in full:

We, imperialist since 1910 (when lots of people whose name is superfluous to state followed foreign and internationalist ideologies and laughed at the very name of imperialism), we who first in Italy in 1912 celebrated the Birth of Rome (when many famous hypernationalists of today didn't even know what it meant), we very first interventionists, we who went to the front voluntarily, we aristocrats who do not accept the concept of nation for the very reason [of being] imperialists, we always thought that no declaration could absolve those who renounced Italian lands in the name of democracy, in the same way that we cannot applaud so-called nationalists for handing over Italy to the priests.<sup>834</sup>

The target of the article was clearly Mussolini, who had, as we shall see in the section on the Lateran accords, already interacted with Reghini via journalistic diatribes and certainly knew who he was and what he stood for. Mussolini's socialist past is brought up as a ghost to haunt the head of state, and the Catholic nationalists like Corradini are not spared vitriolic words. The article, connecting to a previous writing, already analysed, that appeared in *Atanòr* is concluded once again with what had become one of Reghini's greatest bones of contention with Mussolini: 'And we do not consider the Capitol Hill less glorious than the Golgotha. On the contrary!'<sup>835</sup> Although proceeding with the publication of many articles on esoteric subjects, the final numbers of the journal, from October to December 1925, are more interested in Italian politics and religion than Reghini had promised, when launching the premiere issue. In his article 'Eccessi di Parte Guelfa' ('Excesses on Guelf Behalf', 1925), Reghini laments the

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<sup>833</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 213: 'gli istituti massonici [propugnano] una dottrina ispirata ad una specie di razionalismo mistico, che, assurdo per sè stesso, è poi quanto di più antitetico si possa immaginare con il carattere fondamentale del sentimento e del pensiero italiano'.

<sup>834</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 215: 'Noi, imperialisti dal 1910 (quando tanta gente di cui è inutile fare il nome seguiva ideologie straniere ed internazionaliste e derideva sino il nome imperialismo), noi che primi in Italia nel 1912 abbiamo festeggiato il Natale di Roma (quando tanti illustri ipernazionali di oggi non sapevano neanche cosa volesse dire), noi interventisti della prima ora, noi che per nostra volontà siamo stati al fronte, noi aristocratici che non accettiamo il principio di nazionalità appunto perché imperialisti, abbiamo sempre pensato che nessuna considerazione poteva assolvere i rinunciatari a terre italiane in nome della democrazia, come non possiamo applaudire i cosiddetti nazionalisti che han consegnato l'Italia ai preti.

<sup>835</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 224: 'E non riteniamo il Campidoglio meno glorioso del Golgota. Anzi!'

damage caused to the masonic temples by anti-masonic and Fascist sympathisers in the cities of Florence, Rome and Leghorn. Truly alarmed by the violence, which Reghini is convinced to be encouraged by Jesuits and other members of the clergy, writes:<sup>836</sup>

The Government, which alarms itself in an exaggerated and unjustified way for the possible interventions of the masonic hierarchy against that of the State and the fascist one (which are not and should not be the same thing), would do err in considering a bit closer the consequences to which it is exposed, and with it the country) the inference of another hierarchy, more subtle and close, which prefers its confessional interests to the Italian interests, since the true leaders are foreign, and the true instigator has an international and markedly anti-Italian character.<sup>837</sup>

The political climate at the end of 1925 had escalated: Tito Zanaboni (1883-1960), a socialist activist, attempted on Mussolini's life, with a precision rifle from a hotel overlooking *Palazzo Chigi*, the building where the Fascist government had taken office in.<sup>838</sup> The violent actions of the Fascist police escalated, and Reghini soon realised that the December issue of *Ignis* was going to be the last he would edit.

#### 4. UR AND THE UR GROUP: PRACTICAL OCCULTISM

##### 4.1. THE UR JOURNAL (1927-1928)

1926 began with a collaboration between Reghini, his disciple Giulio Parise and Julius Evola: the anti-masonic propaganda, and the consequent violence and destruction aimed at masonic temple and affiliates, forced Reghini to share his responsibilities as editor of a journal: in a very short span of time, *Atanòr* and *Ignis* had been shut down, Freemasonry had been banned, and Reghini's idea of *imperium* did not attract many

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<sup>836</sup> Maximus, 'Eccessi di Parte Guelfa', *Ignis* 1:10 (1925), pp. 318-320.

<sup>837</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 319-320: 'Il Governo, che si allarma in modo così esagerato ed ingiustificato per le possibili inframmettenze della gerarchia massonica a danno di quella dello Stato e di quella fascista (che non sono e non devono essere la stessa cosa), non farebbe male se considerasse un pò attentamente le conseguenze cui lo espone (e con lui il paese) la inframmettenza di un'altra gerarchia, più subdola e più vicina, che antepone esplicitamente gli interessi confessionali a quelli italiani, anche perché i veri capi ne sono stranieri, ed il vero ispiratore ha un carattere internazionale e nettamente antiitaliano'.

<sup>838</sup> See Paolo Cacace, *Quando Mussolini Rischiò di Morire* (Rome: Fazi Editore: 2007).



sympathies outside of the *Schola*, while the regime and the Vatican were slowly, but progressively getting closer to an agreement. After long deliberations, the three decided to start a new journal and name it *Ur*, where Arturo Reghini would have been the secret grey eminence, hiding behind the pseudonym of Pietro Negri; Evola would take care of the political and administrative side of things; Parise, the most wealthy of the three, would be secretary and treasurer.<sup>839</sup> The first issue of *Ur: Rivista di Indirizzi di una Scienza per l'Io* was published in January 1927. The contributors to the journal came from the most disparate esoteric backgrounds, and, for the sake of convenience, have been divided into three main groups by researcher Renato del Ponte: firstly, even on an editorial level, the Pythagoreans Reghini and Parise, joined by Aniceto del Massa, represented a strong presence within the multifaceted currents of the contributors. The idea to write under pseudonym, in order for the texts not to be judged by the personal ideas on the author was strictly Pythagorean, and all seemed to accept the idea happily: thus Reghini wrote as *Pietro Negri* or *Henìocos Àristos*, Parise as *Luce* and del Massa as *Sagittario*; Evola appeared under many different guises, and even the anonymous articles have been ascribed to him by del Ponte, de Turrís and Hakl.<sup>840</sup> his pseudonyms were *Agarda*, *Arvo*, *Ea* and *Iagla*. The second group, quite surprisingly, given Evola's opinion on Steiner, were the Antroposophists: Giovanni Colazza as *Leo*, poet Arturo Onofri (1885-1928) as *Oso*, Corrado Reginelli (1905-?) as *Taurulus*. The third biggest influence came from the Kremmerzian milieu especially through the contributions of Ercole Quadrelli (nd.). However it is important to notice that, as for *Atanòr* and *Ignis*, a contribution could be submitted by men only. As Hakl explains, '[t]he reasoning behind this was very simple: esoterically [according to the editorial board], only men are bound with the "sky" and thus with transcendence,

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<sup>839</sup> Sestito, *Figlio del Sole*, p. 203; for a exhaustive literature on *Ur* and the *Ur* Group, see Renato del Ponte, *Evola e il Magico 'Gruppo di Ur': Studi e Documenti per Scrivere la Storia di 'Ur-Krur'* (Borzano: SeaR, 1994); Julius Evola, *Il Cammino del Cinabro*, pp. 157-176; Gianfranco de Turrís, 'La Concezione Magica dell'Uomo e del Mondo', *Vie della Tradizione* 1:2 (1971), pp. 59-70; Renato del Ponte, 'Evola e l'Esperienza del "Gruppo di Ur"', *Arthos* 2-3:4-5 (1973), pp. 177-191; Marco Mori, 'Il Gruppo di "Ur"', *Yghieia* 3:1-4 (1986), pp. 6-7; Gianfranco de Turrís, 'Il Gruppo di Ur tra Magia e Superfascismo', *Abstracta* 2:6, pp. 12-21; Renato del Ponte, *Il Movimento Tradizionalista*. Most recently, the first English article on the subject has been published: Hans Thomas Hakl, 'Julius Evola and the UR group', *Aries* 12:1 (2012), pp. 53-89.

<sup>840</sup> For the identity behind the pseudonyms, see the list by del Ponte, *Magico Gruppo di Ur*, pp. 179-182.

whereas women are bound to the earth. Just as a man is responsible for spiritual “fertility”, a woman is responsible for earthly fertility’.<sup>841</sup>

In its first editorial, the character of *Ur* is clearly stated as: ‘initiatic, hierarchical, traditional, Western, and elitist’.<sup>842</sup> Del Ponte conveniently divides the subject matter of the articles in four major groups: firstly, there were those referring to ‘esoteric doctrine and culture’, which delved into practical methods and symbology of esoteric practice; secondly articles devoted to ‘practice’, to the narration of personal experiences in practicing magic; the third group of articles dealt with the ‘editing or translation of classic or rare esoteric texts’; the fourth was devoted to ‘doctrinal synthetic overviews’ of various esoteric traditions.<sup>843</sup> The Pythagoreans, headed by Reghini, contributed to all of the above sections, and some of Reghini’s articles are worthy of being analysed more scrupulously. In his ‘Della Tradizione Occidentale’ (‘On the Western Tradition’, 1928), Reghini synthesises the main arguments that constitute his main theories regarding the existence of a Tradition in the West: Paganism has been devalued because of the increasing, and then totalising influence of the Church in European history through the centuries.<sup>844</sup> In his writings, Reghini opposed ‘1) the Western character of Christianity 2) the Christian character of the Western initiatic tradition’.<sup>845</sup> Reghini’s erudition on a cultural level has been attested throughout this dissertation, and not much more needs to be said about it or about his ideas on matters of religion and politics. Where Reghini’s *Ur* contributions shine, is when they provide the reader with practical instructions for the practice of magic and personal experiences when practicing it. Here we can glean more about the nature of the rituals employed by Reghini, as in the short article ‘Avventure e Disavventure in Magia’ (‘Adventures and Misadventures in Magic’, 1927): in this article, Reghini describes all the practicalities of actually performing a ritual. Having narrated about his trip to a subterranean vault at three in the morning, Reghini describes the rest of his

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<sup>841</sup> Hakl, ‘Ur Group’, p. 69.

<sup>842</sup> Anonymous [Julius Evola], ‘Ai Lettori’, *Ur* 2:1 (1928), pp. i-vii [v]: ‘iniziatico, gerarchico, tradizionale, Occidentale, ed elitario’.

<sup>843</sup> del Ponte, *Magico Gruppo di Ur*, p. 67: ‘dottrina e cultura esoterica’, ‘pratica’, edizione o traduzione di testi esoterici’, ‘inquadramenti dottrinari sintetici’.

<sup>844</sup> Pietro Negri [Arturo Reghini], ‘Della Tradizione Occidentale: Prima Parte’, *Ur* 2:1 (1928) pp. 47-74.

<sup>845</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52: ‘1) l’occidentalità del Cristianesimo 2) il carattere Cristiano della tradizione iniziatica occidentale’.

evening, the matches dampened by humidity, his having to kneel and crawl in order to get to the ritual vault:

I grab the sword according to the ritual, wear my glasses, use my left to hold a roll of paper prepared for the occasion in order to unravel it with one hand and read the long invocation written on it, I turn eastwards, poise the sword in the direction of the sign of the operation and well aware of what I am doing, I begin to say slowly and loudly: ‘Greatest power of every power...’ I gladly notice that the lamplight allows me to read the words of the invocation and that everything is proceeding. But what now? What is this wind? Why does it pick up now to sway the flames and disturb my reading!? And what now? I can’t see anymore! For all the Gods of Olympus, my glasses clouded over!<sup>846</sup>

This article, in some parts amusing, was actually an important presence in the journal, for it attested to practical workings and made clear that the purpose of *Ur* was not that of satisfying armchair magicians, but wanted to inspire the few people it would captivate to practice magic and work towards transcendence. Given the nature of this, and other important articles in the two years of publication of the journal, did its contributors practice magic together? And if so, of what nature?

#### 4.2. THE *UR* GROUP AND THE BREAK WITH EVOLA

Despite the collection of articles being dismissed as a ‘hodgepodge collection’, members of what was called the *Ur* Group definitely practiced the magic they wrote

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<sup>846</sup> Pietro Negri [Arturo Reghini], ‘Avventure e Disavventure in Magia’, *Ur* 1:10 (1927), pp. 388-395: ‘Impugno ritualmente la spada, inforco gli occhiali, prendo con la sinistra un rotolo di carta appositamente preparato in modo da poterlo svolgere usando una sola mano per leggere la lunga invocazione scrittavi su, mi volgo ad oriente, metto la spada in direzione del segno e dell’operazione e ben conscio di quanto faccio comincio lentamente e fortemente a dire: “Potenza somma di ogni potenza...”. Constato con piacere che la luce della lampada mi permette di seguire a mio agio le parole dell’invocazione e che tutto sta procedendo. Ma che cosa succede? Che cosa è questo vento? Proprio ora si desta per agitar le fiammelle e disturbar la lettura!? Ed ora che accade? Non ci vedo più! Per tutti gli Dei dell’Olimpo, mi si sono appannati gli occhiali!’

about:<sup>847</sup> the ultimate goal was ‘the realisation of oneself, in itself, and of existence. That or nothing’.<sup>848</sup> This was the reason why the contributors to the journal scoured every text on traditional knowledge they could find: ‘ancient theurgical texts, as well as hermetical and alchemical works of the Middle Ages and the early modern era. The teachings of yoga, tantra, Taoism, and Buddhism were likewise studied’.<sup>849</sup> Both Hakl and del Ponte agree in stating that the magic practiced by the members of the *Ur* Group was not of a ceremonial type, or certainly not only of a ceremonial nature: ‘Ur strove to “High Magic” which can be described as “practical metaphysics” with the goal of self-deification’.<sup>850</sup>

Beyond the experiences of the larger group of collaborators to the *Ur* Group, there was also an inner circle, who wanted to achieve bigger goals: the members of this inner group were very few, consisting, in Rome, of Evola, Reghini, Parise, Quadrelli and Colazza.<sup>851</sup> The aim for this group magic rituals was that of creating an *egregore*, a collective mass of psychic force, that could attract other higher energies to itself: in more simple words, the group rituals were enacted in order to raise an energy powerful enough to influence not only the individual’s development, but the world at large, and, in particular, the political situation of the day, which saw Mussolini steadily drifting away from Roman imperialist ideas, drawing closer and closer to a pact with the Vatican.<sup>852</sup> As Evola writes in his memoirs:

There was a more ambitious objective, that an influence from above, through evocation, could be formed on the kind of psychic body that we wanted to create. In such a case we wouldn’t have excluded the possibility to exert, behind the scenes, an action even on the predominant forces in the general world of the day. As to the direction of such action, the main points of reference would have been more or less those of *Imperialismo Pagano* and of the “roman” ideals of Arturo Reghini.<sup>853</sup>

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<sup>847</sup> de Luca, *Reghini*, p. 73.

<sup>848</sup> Anonymous, ‘Ai Lettori’, quoted in Hakl, ‘Ur Group’, p. 76.

<sup>849</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.

<sup>850</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.

<sup>851</sup> See Renato del Ponte, ‘E come Esoterismo’, in *Il Maestro della Tradizione: Dialoghi su Julius Evola*, ed. by Marco Iacona (Naples: Controcorrente, 2008), pp. 81-92 [83-4].

<sup>852</sup> Hakl., p. 84; de Luca, p. 108-9.

<sup>853</sup> Evola, *Cammino del Cinabro*, p. 163.

The *Imperialismo Pagano* (Heathen Imperialism, 1928) mentioned by Evola was not the oft-quoted article by Reghini, published in 1914 and 1924, but a new book written by Evola and published in 1928.<sup>854</sup> The publication of this work was the beginning of the rift that was going to separate the Pythagoreans and Evola forever: other accidents had marred the relationship between the two members of the *Schola* and Evola, such as the masonic connection of Parise and Reghini, which Evola had always criticized; Parise's affair with Sibilla Aleramo and the publication of her *Amo dunque Sono* had only exacerbated Evola's relationship with Parise, and for a while Evola produced articles on various journals slandering both Aleramo and Parise, until Parise decided to settle scores via a fist-fight in which Evola allegedly ended up bruised and battered,<sup>855</sup> the tipping point was the publication of Evola's new book, which not only plagiarised the title of Reghini's article, but also, according to the Florentine occultist, the contents and idea contained therein.<sup>856</sup> The three editors ended the *Ur* experience with the December issue of 1928. In 1929, Reghini and Parise launched a new version of *Ignis*, but due to financial problems, the new journal never went past the first issue. A lawsuit followed, and the attention gained by Reghini made it so that his name was put in the list of people to follow and gather information on by the secret police. The numerous articles by Evola, denouncing Reghini as a Freemason also made him *persona non grata*: in the end, Reghini won the law suit, and Evola had to publish a letter of apology on the *Roma Fascista* (Fascist Rome) paper, but the damage to his reputation had been done.<sup>857</sup> Bigger problems seemed to loom over the Pagan imperialists' heads, though, as Mussolini and the Vatican were always closer to a collaboration, which would represent the end of Reghini's Pagan dream.

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<sup>854</sup> Julius Evola, *Imperialismo Pagano: Il Fascismo Dinnanzi al Pericolo Euro-Cristiano* (Rome: Atanòr, 1928).

<sup>855</sup> See de Luca, *Reghini*, p. 109: 'the robust hands of my co-editor of "Ignis"', wrote Reghini, 'are without a doubt quite experienced in slapping who deserves it and will not respond'.

<sup>856</sup> *Ibid.*, p. n112: 'in Italy a book by Evola has been published titled "Imperialismo Pagano", which, starting from the title is a complete unconfessed plagiarism of my writings; he took all: ideas, arguments, maxims, entire sentences, even my jokes. What he didn't copy from me he took from Guénon, you (without quoting you), Celso and Rougier..'

<sup>857</sup> See del Massa, *Pagine Esoteriche*, pp. 53-4: 'Evola offered to the tribunal a complete recantation and after the addenda and the clarifications wanted by Reghini, he signed the recantation which will have to be published at his expense on *Roma Fascista*'.

## 5. THE END OF THE PAGAN DREAM

### 5.1. FASCISM AND THE VATICAN

On 11 February 1929, in palace *San Giovanni in Laterano* (St. John in Lateran), cardinal-secretary of the Vatican Pietro Gasparri (1852-1934) and President of the Council of Ministers and *Duce d'Italia* Benito Mussolini met in order to ratify the new undertaking of an official bilateral relationship between the Holy See and the Kingdom of Italy.<sup>858</sup> The signing of these negotiations ended the *Questione Romana*, which, since the conquest of Rome by the King in 1870, had denied the Vatican any temporal power. The content of these *Patti Lateranensi* (Lateran Pacts) consisted of three main documents: the first one recognised the independence of the Vatican State; the second required a payment of 750 million liras to the Church, in order to make up for all of the Church's properties throughout Italy, which had been confiscated through the years; the third, the Concordat, defined the new roles between the Catholic Church and the Kingdom and guaranteed the Vatican the payment of one almost two billion liras for the financial loss the Holy See had incurred to during the period between 1870 and 1929. Two days later, Pope Pius XI delivered the famous speech, during which he called Mussolini the man 'that Providence has sent to us'.<sup>859</sup> The debate in the Senate to ratify the Pacts was lengthy, animated and saw great opposition on behalf of the anticlerical fringe of senators: most notably, Benedetto Croce was one of the few who voted against the ratification until the end.

A lot had changed since the Fascist violence of 1919 had destroyed some of the Church's properties around the country: in Mussolini's eyes, the Vatican was as great a danger as Communism, and the anti-Catholic rethoric culminated in 1923, with the assassination of don Giovanni Minzoni (1885-1923), who, in his parish, had preferred to run a camp of the Scout Movement instead of the state-imposed *Opera Nazionale Balilla* (Balilla National Organization), the Italian Fascist Youth Organization organised by Mussolini's government. Minzoni's skull was smashed by

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<sup>858</sup> See Luca Ceci, *L'Interesse Superiore: Il Vaticano e l'Italia di Mussolini* (Bari: Laterza & Figli, 2013); Giovanni Sale, *La Chiesa di Mussolini: I Rapporti tra Fascismo e Religione* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2011).

<sup>859</sup> Pius XI, 'Vogliamo Anzitutto', w2.vatican.va, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/it/speeches/documents/hf\\_p-xi\\_spe\\_19290213\\_vogliamo-anzitutto.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/it/speeches/documents/hf_p-xi_spe_19290213_vogliamo-anzitutto.html) (Last accessed September 23 2016): 'la Provvidenza ci ha mandato.

two Fascist youths, and the incident had a huge impact on the media of the day, the Church condemning the murder and accusing Mussolini of instigating youths against the clergy.<sup>860</sup> During his socialist days, Mussolini ‘despised priests. The clergy was the target of the most vicious attacks by the young socialist agitator’.<sup>861</sup> By the time Mussolini rose to power, though, both the *Duce* and the Vatican had realised that a mutual peace would have been much more profitable for both: the Vatican saw Mussolini as the only man in Italian politics, who could grant the Holy See the temporal power it had lost after Cadorna’s breach of Porta Pia, while Mussolini needed something that could unite all the peoples of the relatively newly-formed Kingdom of Italy: since language, culture, economic status and quality of life were vastly different from region to region, the Catholic religion seemed like the only quality shared by all Italians. Nevertheless, notwithstanding the concessions made to the Vatican, declaring Catholicism to be the only state-religion in Italy and granting Vatican City its independence, Mussolini was always adamant in claiming that the regime still had full control over the Italian people. In a speech delivered on 14 May 1929, Mussolini made his ideas known to his government representatives:

What would the State be if it didn’t have its own spirit, its own moral, which is what gives strength to its laws, and because of which it makes citizens obey it? What would the State be? A miserable thing, against which the citizens would have the right to revolt or to despise. The fascist State lays claim to its ethical character completely: it is catholic, but it is fascist, moreso especially exclusively, essentially fascist. Catholicism integrates it and we declare it openly, but nobody think that, under philosophical or metaphysical guise, the status quo may be changed.<sup>862</sup>

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<sup>860</sup> *Diario di Don Minzoni*, ed. by Lorenzo Bedeschi (Brescia: Morcelliana, 1965); Nicola Palumbi, *Don Giovanni Minzoni. Educatore e Martire* (Milan: Nicola Palumbi, 2003).

<sup>861</sup> Ceci, *Interesse Superiore*, p. 3.

<sup>862</sup> G.S. and E. Spinetti, *Sintesi della Dottrina Fascista*, ed. by Marco Piraino and Stefano Fiorito (Bologna: pp., 2015), p. 321: ‘Che cosa sarebbe lo Stato se non avesse un suo spirito, una sua morale, che è quella che dà la forza alle sue leggi, e per la quale esso riesce a farsi ubbidire dai cittadini? Che cosa sarebbe lo Stato? Una cosa miserevole, davanti alla quale i cittadini avrebbero il diritto della rivolta o del disprezzo. Lo Stato fascista rivendica in pieno il suo carattere di eticità: è cattolico, ma è fascista, anzi soprattutto esclusivamente, essenzialmente fascista. Il Cattolicesimo lo integra, e noi lo dichiariamo apertamente, ma nessuno pensi, sotto la specie filosofica o metafisica, di cambiarci le carte in tavola’.

On the other side, the Pope minimised the friction and cherished his newly acquired independence, temporal power, the huge sum to be paid by the Kingdom of Italy, and the fact that Catholicism was the national creed. The fact that Fascism had smashed any liberal or socialist opposition in Italy meant that the road to a full christianization of the country had been made relatively easier.

The Lateran Pacts had, in practice, changed very little in the life of the average Italian: religion was taught in schools, and the Church oversaw everything in matter of marriage and divorce, but the State was always the over-arching structure pulling the strings and affecting everyday life. But what about the non-average Italians of the *Schola* who, as we have seen, had fought against this outcome, and had seen Mussolini choose the side of the most anti-masonic entity in Italy, the Vatican?

## 5.2. THE ENSUING QUIET CHAOS

Following the botched attempt of a recreation of a masonic body in Rome in 1929, and after Evola's remarks on the press about Reghini being a Freemason, the secret police cracked down on Reghini. He still refused to be a card carrying member of the regime, and in these conditions, his chances of finding a teaching job in public schools were minimal. With Armentano in Brazil, with no possibility of creating a masonic body, which he could vehicle his Pythagorean teachings through, Reghini retired from all occult milieus, and as Sestito put it, became a '*doctor mathematicus*', dedicating the entirety of his time to teaching and writing about mathematical subjects.<sup>863</sup> His journalistic confrontation with Mussolini had not reaped the benefits he had hoped, and by now the Golgotha must have seemed to tower over the Capitol Hill. His writings on *Ur* had also attracted the attention of Giovanni Battista Montini (1897-1978), future Pope Paul VI, who in an article dated June 1928, had lambasted the *Ur* Group as being

Clear and educational, and most of all convincing.

Convincing, at least to show how the abuse of thought and word, in the undoing of traditional knowledge, may convince with rhetorical

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<sup>863</sup> Sestito, *Figlio del Sole*, p. 241.



aberrations, fanatic re-evocations and superstitious magic those who go against truth and those who seek mystery. It is not useful to think of that wise world of fairies, which Chesterton makes a defence of; neither the very provincial attempt to gain lotto numbers; at least these are instructive things, funny and maybe even useful: but they are too simple and humble before the moving heroism in the multisports ideological acrobatics of these esoteric sages.<sup>864</sup>

The Concordat between the regime and the Vatican had left Reghini in a vulnerable position. Without his mentor, only few friends, such as Mori, Guerrieri, Parise, and the occasional visit from del Massa from Florence, the dream of a Pagan renaissance was definitely over. The occult war had been lost, and the attempt to create an intellectual elite that could influence the masses had failed miserably. A symbol of the end of Pagan imperialism was the choice by Armentano to sell Torre Talao, the headquarters of the *Schola*, which had been the location of countless discussions and mysterious rituals.<sup>865</sup> It was time for the alleged uninterrupted chain of initiates to continue with Giulio Parise, Reghini's favoured disciple.

## 6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The publication of *Le Parole Sacre e di Passo* in 1922 sanctioned the beginning of Reghini's most prolific decade as an author: the following endeavors, enacted with Ciro Alvi, with whom Reghini shared many political and philosophical ideas, brought to the publication of the two journals *Atanòr* and *Ignis*: the content of such journals is of such high quality, that they have been reprinted in more recent days, and are still considered to be classics among the occult publications of their days. Not only did

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<sup>864</sup> Giovanni Battista Montini, 'Una Nuova Rivista', *Studium* 26:6 (1928), pp. 323-4: 'Lampante e istruttivo, e soprattutto convincente. Convincente, se non altro per dimostrare come l'abuso di pensiero e di parola, nel disfacimento della sapienza tradizionale, gratifichi di aberrazioni retoriche, rievocazioni fanatiche e di superstiziose magie gli indisciplinati del vero e gli assetati di mistero. Non è il caso di pensare a quel mondo sapiente delle fate di cui Chesterton fa l'apologia; né dello strapaesano tentativo di scoprire i numeri del lotto; coteste almeno sono cose istruttive, divertenti e fors'anche utili; ma sono troppo semplici e umili a confronto dell'eroismo commovente in acrobazia ideologicamente polisportiva di questi saggi esoterici'.

<sup>865</sup> Sestito, *Figlio del Sole*, p. 248.

Reghini have a constant outlet for his many ideas, but the journals also served as a meeting point between the different schools of occultism in Italy: while the Theosophical Society had its own journals, as did the Kremmerzian milieu, *Atanòr* and *Ignis* were open to all who wanted to contribute with an article or a translation with esoteric traits. The publication of these two journals was short-lived: in *Atanòr*'s case for a lack of funding, which Alvi had promised, in the case of *Ignis*, where Reghini was more or less writing half of each issue under different names, it was rather the Bodrero bill, which outlawed secret societies and hence put Reghini in a difficult position. The years 1924 and 1925, though, had cemented Reghini's position as one of the most prominent, if not the most prominent Italian occultists of his day, and his correspondence and collaboration with Guénon, a giant in French occult and Traditionalist circles of the day, can attest to that.

With *Ur* Reghini was forced to remain behind the scenes, as Julius Evola took helm of the publication, with Giulio Parise as treasurer and main funder of the publication. The two years of *Ur*, in my opinion mark the highest moment in the history of Italian occultism, and the mix of theoretical articles and practical advise attracted the attention of many occultists, who, under pseudonym, collaborated with the publication. As is wont in many cases, when analysing occult circles and interactions between occultists, it was personal problems that created a rift between the Baron Evola and the Pythagoreans Reghini and Parise: a rift which would culminate in fist-fights, law suits, and public defamation via newspaper articles. Still, during those two years, in my opinion, Reghini and Evola seemed to have worked practically, and not only by writing articles, in order to influence the political situation of the time, trying to stir Fascism away from the Vatican and closer to the Pagan imperialist ideas of the *Ur* Group, and, whatever did actually happen during the magical workings hinted at, no doubt must have appeared to Reghini to be the culmination of years of study and practice.

The Concordat was the inevitable end between a flirt, which had been going on throughout the 1920s between Mussolini and the Vatican: after february 1929, we can safely say that the dream of a Pagan imperialism, the wish for an aristocratic, antidemocratic, antimodern elite, had vanished forever, leaving Reghini and his

friends to deal with a new life under the fascist state and the Catholic religion, constantly surveilled by the state police.

**CHAPTER 8:**  
**THE FINAL YEARS (1930-1946)**

Therefore I believe in the one that contains all,  
Motion, strength, intelligence, good, love and death.  
I believe in the ascension of man to the infinite one,  
In the universal law of all that was, is and eternally will be.<sup>866</sup>

Giuliano Kremmerz

**1. REGHINI'S LAST YEARS AS AN EXILE IN HIS OWN LAND**

After the Concordat and the abrupt end to his dream of a Pagan renaissance, Reghini, according to his main biographers, seemed to have severed most of his ties with the masonic world and the Roman occult milieu at large. His communications with Armentano, now permanently living in Sao Paulo, Brazil, became more and more difficult, since the Fascist secret police had opened a permanent file on him, and monitored his movements and correspondence constantly:<sup>867</sup> on the first page of his personal file, dated 19 January 1930, the anonymous secret agent wrote that ‘in the highest echelons of the Party, it is thought that until there will be a chance of a “Ghibelline Fascism” in Italy Doctor Reghini will be held in high esteem’.<sup>868</sup>

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<sup>866</sup> Quoted in Caliel [Luigi Petriccioli], *Frammenti dal Sacramentario delle Fratellanze Ermetiche* (Viareggio: Rebis., 2011.), p. 4: ‘Così credo nell’uno che tutto in sé contiene, moto, forza, intelligenza, bene, amore e morte. Credo nell’ascenso dell’uomo all’uno infinito, nella legge universale di ciò che fu, che è, e che in eterno sarà’.

<sup>867</sup> See Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Ministero dell’Interno. Divisione Polizia Politica. *Fascicolo per Persone: Busta 1105. Fascicolo 35 Reghini, Dottor Arturo*; Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Ministero dell’Interno. Divisione Polizia Politica. *Fascicolo per Materie. Busta 100. Fascicolo 8 Ordine Teosofico (1927-1930)*; Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Ministero dell’Interno. Divisione Polizia Politica. *Fascicolo per Materie. Busta 95. Fascicolo 5. Massoneria*.

<sup>868</sup> *Fascicolo 35 Reghini, Dottor Arturo*, p. 1: ‘nelle alte gerarchie del Partito si ritiene che finché in Italia esisterà la possibilità di un “Fascismo Ghibellino” il Dottor Reghini sarà tenuto in gran conto’.

Reghini's loyalty to Fascism never seemed in doubt, although his ideas were considered by informants and agents to be questionable and his morality, and that of Armentano, was often questioned: 'the Head of Government may absolutely believe to use these people for immediate gains, but it is not a useless endeavour to tell you that we are talking about men without scruples, who parade their disgust for moral laws, who obey secular sectarian [ie. masonic] goals [...]'.<sup>869</sup> Reghini's ideas, in the end, were considered impractical and slightly eccentric, the same informant concluding with a critique of 'unattainable things in this historical period (for example the evaluation of pagan myths as facts).<sup>870</sup> It is therefore certain that Mussolini and the secret police knew, albeit in a confused manner, the aims of the *Schola Italica* and the first quote shows that the possibility of using the ghibelline contingent was real, should the Vatican exaggerate on their post-Concordat demands: the relationship between the Vatican and Fascism was consolidated even more in the 1930s, making the members of the *Schola Italica*, who had until then entertained a modicum of freedom, expendable. It has recently been discovered that Vittorio Falorsi and Amerigo Bianchini, two of the few friends of Reghini still remaining were informants to OVRA, the secret police. Reghini had briefly shared a flat in Rome with Bianchini.<sup>871</sup> Despite such changes in the political scene, Reghini still believed in the possibility of a Traditionalist alliance with the regime, and in 1933, for the first time, he became a card-carrying member of the *Partito Nazionale Fascista*.<sup>872</sup>

Even though we are therefore certain of Reghini's seemingly privileged status under the regime, most of the time spent in Rome during the 1930s saw the Florentine thinker moving from school to school, teaching algebra and trying to make ends meet. The break with Evola had had repercussions on his career as a teacher, and Reghini

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<sup>869</sup> *Fascicolo 8 Ordine Teosofico (1927-1930)*, p. 2: 'il Capo del Governo può benissimo credere di servirsi di questi uomini per scopi immediati, ma non è inutile farvi osservare che si tratta di uomini che non hanno scrupoli, che ostentano disprezzo per le leggi morali, che obbediscono a motivi settari secolari [...]'.  
<sup>870</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2: 'cose non realizzabili nell'Evo storico (ad esempio la valutazione come fatto dei miti pagani)'.  
<sup>871</sup> See Fabio Fucci, *Le Polizie di Mussolini. La Repressione dell'Antifascismo nel 'Ventennio'* (Milan: Mursia, 2019), p. 98 and 235-6; Mimmo Franzinelli, *I Tentacoli dell'OVRA: Agenti, Collaboratori e Vittime della Polizia Politica Fascista* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1999), p. 256.  
<sup>872</sup> Archivio Centrale dello Stato. Ministero dell'Interno. PS-G1. Busta 129. *Fascicolo 416. Logge Teosofiche. Nota informativa della Regia Questura di Roma del 18 Dicembre 1934*, p. 1.

found it harder and harder to find a position as a teacher in Roman state schools. In Parise's famous biographical note, we find a slice of life of what the Pythagoreans remaining in Rome did to pass the time:

We played chess, we reasoned on the political ills of the day, but mostly we talked about what was closest to our hearts: of the possibility, still very far away, but certain, of better future forms of civic life, of a return of freemasonry [...].<sup>873</sup>

Like di Luca, I am inclined to think that, even though working in total secrecy, Reghini still had a Pythagorean nucleus gravitating around him, a group of people who still met and practiced the *Schola's* rituals.<sup>874</sup> In Aniceto del Massa's *Pagine Esoteriche*, a diary of the Anthroposophist's interactions with the occult, we find a very telling passage that corroborates this hypothesis:

This evening [25 July 1933] Reghini was here, in my studio. [...]. When I go to Rome I hope to be admitted to the experiences that take place in a circle headed by him and about which he briefly spoke to me.<sup>875</sup>

Nevertheless, in 1939, with the political situation precipitating, Reghini decided to move away from Rome, in order to have more time to dedicate to a long work he had begun writing in 1936 and finished in 1944. His friend and fellow *Schola* member Enrico Salvi (?-1937) had died of a stroke, and had left associate Camilla Partengo (1887-1970) in charge of the private school 'Quirico Filopanti' in Budrio, a small town near Bologna.<sup>876</sup> The exact dynamics of this move north to Budrio are explained in a letter sent by Bianchini to Armentano on 12 October 1939:

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<sup>873</sup> Parise, 'Nota', p. xii: 'si giocava a scacchi; si ragionava sui guai politici del momento, ma soprattutto si parlava di quanto più ci stava a cuore: della possibilità, ancora troppo lontana, di migliori forme avvenire di vita civile, d'un ritorno della massoneria [...].

<sup>874</sup> di Luca, *Reghini*, p. 128: 'there is reason to believe [...] that a "pythagorean" group gravitated around him'.

<sup>875</sup> del Massa, *Pagine Esoteriche*, p. 53-4: 'Stasera Reghini è stato qui, nel mio studio [...]. Quando andrò a Roma spero di essere ammesso alle esperienze che si svolgono in un circolo da lui diretto e intorno al quale mi ha brevemente accennato'.

<sup>876</sup> See Sestito, *Figlio del Sole*, p. 242-3.

I saw Arturo a couple of evenings ago and with sadness he told me that in a few days he will be moving to Bologna [more precisely Budrio], to teach at the Scuola Itlica [name the Pythagoreans used for the school founded by Salvi] which is still operating and is supervised by miss Partengo who has remained devoted to Salvi, who as I told you at the time died of an apoplectic fit while travelling.<sup>877</sup>

His final seven years were spent teaching and writing the seven volumes of *Dei Numeri Pitagorici*. Little has been written about this period in Reghini's life, and for a brief coverage I am going to resort to the very last known letter ever sent by Reghini to Armentano, dated 21 April 1946, the *dies natalis* of Rome, 70 days before his death.<sup>878</sup> In it, between ironic anecdotes typical of the Florentine thinker and more serious thoughts, aiming at summing up a lifetime of dedication towards the Pagan imperialist cause, the reader may witness Reghini at his most honest and open. When complaining about being visited in his mother's house by the Fascist police during a sojourn in Florence, when he was accused of plotting to kill the King, Reghini at first denounces the stupidity of certain ideas, ending on a humorous note: 'luckily my mother was deaf and I was able to tell her a made-up story'.<sup>879</sup> This dry sense of humour, though, was counterbalanced by open, and possibly embarrassing, confessions to his mentor:

'from the summer of '40 this is the situation in Budrio. [...] the secretary of the republican fasces kicked us out [of the school] in the middle of the street by force; and hardships and hostilities of every kind started: the fascists, the evacuees, the Germans who stayed in my house for ten months and forced us to close the school [...].<sup>880</sup>

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<sup>877</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 343: 'Ho visto Arturo poche sere fa e con rammarico mi da la notizia che tra giorni trasferirà a Bologna per insegnare alla Scuola Itlica che è ancora viva e tenuta dalla signorina Partengo rimasta devota a Salvi, che come ebbi a dirti a suo tempo morì per un colpo apoplettico mentre si trovava in viaggio'.

<sup>878</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 248-254.

<sup>879</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 250: 'per fortuna che mia madre era sorda e mi fu possibile raccontarle una storia qualsiasi'.

<sup>880</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 250: 'dall'estate del '40 siamo così in Budrio [...]. Poi il segretario del fascio repubblicano ci ha cacciato con la forza in mezzo alla strada; e sono cominciate le difficoltà e le ostilità di ogni specie: i fascisti, gli sfollati, i tedeschi che si sono installati anche in casa per dieci mesi e ci hanno costretto a chiudere la scuola [...].

The closing of the letter expresses all of the sadness of a man left to his own devices in a provincial town, in post war Italy: '[o]f all the friends who were supposed to give me a hand, nobody managed; Cavalli committed suicide, Moretto went bankrupt, you are where you are, others have abandoned me'. The rest of the letter is replete with sincere thanks towards Armentano and a foreboding feeling of his impending death, which Reghini himself judged almost like a blessing, since in this difficult position, he did not feel that he could contribute in any useful way to the *Schola's* cause.<sup>881</sup> His health, too, had rapidly declined: in the span of very few years he had broken both of his arms and had an ulcer on his left cheek, which at the time of writing the letter, he was treating with radiation therapy in a hospital in Bologna: of course, he made sure his mentor knew that 'intelligence, memory and resistance to work [are] the same as before'.<sup>882</sup> Before moving on to a small section on his death, a segment of this concluding chapter needs to be dedicated to his literary works in the post-Concordat period: works that brought Reghini closer to his first love, Pythagorean mathematics, although some writings with a political leaning may be found too.

## 2. REGHINI'S 1930s AND 1940s LITERARY PRODUCTION

Reghini's first published article in the 1930s is titled 'Il Fascio Littorio' (The Lictorial Fasces, 1934), an analysis on the occult qualities of the Fasces employed as symbol of the Fascist Regime<sup>883</sup>: the subject chosen is in line with his renewed interest in Fascism and his request to join the party in 1933. In the study of the Fasces, it is Reghini's intent to underline 'the traditional and occult value of the glorious lictorial fasces'.<sup>884</sup> The twelve rods that compose the bundle of reeds, along with the twelve carriers of the fasces in ancient Rome, suggested to Reghini a connection with the magic and religion of ancient people, and therefore the presence of a symbol handed down from antiquity and representing a link between ancient Rome and the Fascist

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<sup>881</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 253.

<sup>882</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 253: 'l'intelligenza, la memoria e la resistenza all lavoro [sono] quelle di prima'.

<sup>883</sup> Arturo Reghini, 'Il Fascio Littorio', *Docens* 10-11 (1934), republished as idem, *Il Simbolismo Duodecimale e il Fascio Etrusco*, ed. by Renato del Ponte (Genoa: Edizioni del Basilisco, 1980).

<sup>884</sup> *Ibid.*, p22: 'il valore occulto e tradizionale del glorioso simbolo del fascio littorio'.



regime.<sup>885</sup> The whole article is devoted to two subjects: the mathematical link of the fasces to Roman and Etruscan tradition through the number twelve and the consequent imperial and universal value of said fasces, which did not pair as well with the Vatican as it did with the autochthon Roman Tradition:

Very happy to see the lictorial fasces being honoured again, which we venerate deeply, with pagan spirit, immune from exotic infections, we hope their fate will be favourable; we hope for an ever more conscious and deep return to romanity, in all and for all, without submitting the fasces to adverse or different influences.<sup>886</sup>

Reghini's main interest, though, throughout the 1930s and 1940s, was definitely mathematics, and after the article on the fasces, Reghini seems to abandon any dream of political activism.

After six years spent teaching algebra in Roman highschoools, the work Reghini had been toiling over during the early 1930s was published, with the title of *Per la Restituzione della Geometria Pitagorica* (For the Restitution of Pythagorean Geometry, 1935).<sup>887</sup> Parise, with great financial difficulty, had managed to autofinance the publication of the book through his own IGNIS publishing house.<sup>888</sup> The book, within its small niche, was a success, and, after glowing reviews, one of them penned by Reghini's friend Guénon on *Le Voile d'Isis* (The Veil of Isis) journal,<sup>889</sup> it granted the author a prestigious award from the *Accademia dei Lincei* (Lincean Academy) and the *Accademia d'Italia* (Italian Academy): the first was one of the most ancient scientific academies in Italy, the second an academy founded under the Fascist regime.<sup>890</sup> This recognition would then spur Reghini to start what would become his magnum opus, 1936: the seven volume *Dei Numeri Pitagorici* (On

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<sup>885</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22-3.

<sup>886</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35: 'Ben lieti di vedere tornati in onore i fasci littori, che veneriamo profondamente, con spirito pagano, immune da esotiche infezioni, auspichiamo ad essi favorevoli i fati; auspichiamo un ritorno sempre più consapevole e profondo all'romanità, in tutto e per tutto, senza submitters fasces ad influenze avverse o diverse'.

<sup>887</sup> Arturo Reghini, *Per la Restituzione della Geometria Pitagorica* (Rome: IGNIS, 1935).

<sup>888</sup> Sestito, *Figlio del Sole*, p. 242.

<sup>889</sup> René Guénon, *Comptes Rendus* (Paris: Éditions Traditionnelles, 2000), p. 15.

<sup>890</sup> The Accademia dei Lincei had been founded in 1603 in order to promote scientific progress in the Italian peninsula.

Pythagorean Numbers, 1936-1944).<sup>891</sup> At the end of the lengthy *Prologo*, which Reghini himself describes as possessing ‘a philosophical and cultural character in which the subject of pythagorean arithmetics is seen in the light of Pythagoreanism in general’,<sup>892</sup> Reghini tried to summarise the subject of his gargantuan project:

The laws, the properties, the numeric harmonies which open themselves for our contemplation are not a human invention, they exist from before, they dwell in the abyssic depths of the inner world; and demonstrate that to the beauty of the visible cosmos corresponds an equally admirable beauty of the inner universe. By recognizing these beauties and harmonies, it will be then possible, in a socratic and pythagorean way, to ascend and transcend, going up from the material human life up to the divine and spiritual one, and actuate that palingenesis which is the essential aim of the ‘Schola Italica’.<sup>893</sup>

Although dealing with an incredibly difficult subject (the author had written that only Guénon could possibly appreciate it in all of its facets),<sup>894</sup> what could be seen as abstract mathematical exercises are, in fact, grounded in the practical, great work of the *Schola*: as in *Le Parole Sacre e di Passo*, which for a large part deal with the sacred words and pass-words in Freemasonry, the ending of the *Prologue* recognises an identical aim in the study of Freemasonry and Mathematics, namely the possibility to ‘ascend and transcend’ the material in everyday life and obtain a rebirth through

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<sup>891</sup> *Dei Numeri Pitagorici*, finished only two years before Reghini’s death, was never printed during his lifetime: the prologue and the first two books have been published in recent years: see Arturo Reghini, *Dei Numeri Pitagorici: Prologo* (Ancona: Associazione Culturale Ignis, 2003); idem, *Dei Numeri Pitagorici, Parte Prima - Volume Primo - Dell’equazione Indeterminata di Secondo Grado con Due Incognite* (Milan: Archè/Pizeta, 2006); idem, *Dei Numeri Pitagorici, Parte Prima - Volume Secondo - Delle Soluzioni Primitive dell’Equazione di Tipo Pell  $x^2 - Dy^2 = B$  e del loro Numero* (Milan: Archè/Pizeta, 2012).

<sup>892</sup> Quoted in di Luca, p. 129: ‘di carattere filosofico e culturale in cui la questione dell’aritmetica pitagorica è inquadrata nel pitagorismo generale’.

<sup>893</sup> Reghini, *Dei Numeri: Prologo*, p.106: ‘Le leggi, le proprietà, le armonie numeriche che si offrono alla nostra contemplazione non sono invenzione umana, esse preesistono, esse sono nella profondità abissale dell’interiorità; e provano che alla bellezza del cosmo visibile corrisponde un altrettanto mirabile bellezza dell’universo interiore. Dal riconoscimento di queste bellezze ed armonie sarà poi possibile, socraticamente e pitagoricamente, ascendere e trascendere, assurgendo dalla vita materiale ed umana a quella divina e spirituale, ed attuare quella palingenesi che è lo scopo essenziale della “Schola Italica”.

<sup>894</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 102: ‘I do not care of other people’s judgement since I do not know of anyone who could judge [my work], under all of its aspects except, maybe, Guénon’.

the fire of initiation, a palingenesis. Since his talks with Papini and Prezzolini, and even before knowing Armentano, this had been Reghini's dream: to transcend the mundane and reconnect his interiority to a Pythagorean ordered cosmos. It is possibly for this very reason that, since his days at university, he had enjoyed mathematics and geometry. I feel comfortable in conjecturing that, even though nothing is documented about the *Schola Italica*, this contemplative state, this detachment from the physical, the material, and the phenomenal represented the core of all the teachings imparted in the Torre Talao by Amedeo Armentano.

### 3. EPILOGUE

Arturo Reghini died on 1 July 1946, in his home in Budrio. The first-hand account we have of his death is obviously Parise's *Nota*: in it, the reader may find what may seem to be the final sentences of a hagiography: the many stylistic artifices employed to detail the deaths of Mazzini or Garibaldi, for example, are abundantly used, and the impression that Parise wanted to leave to the reader was definitely not that of the death of a common man, but that of a man who had gone through his palingnesis and could serenely look forward to the next stage of his life. Camilla Partengo, too, in describing his last days, wrote: 'He was an example of that spiritual calm typical of who lives in a superior world and doesn't fear anything'.<sup>895</sup> Roberto Sestito himself, biographer and follower of Reghini, writes at the end of his biography that Reghini can best be described as a hero: 'Hero, in the language of classical tradition, was not only the tutelary deity of cities or families, but also the Master of Magic who had attained immortality, in life and post-mortem'.<sup>896</sup> Going back to Parise's account, the tone is not much different:

The first day of July of 1946, the spirit of Arturo Reghini released its corporeal bonds and passed into the Eternal Light. It was the fifth hour of the afternoon. The sign had appeared. Arturo Reghini turned towards the

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<sup>895</sup> Quoted in Sestito, *Figlio del Sole*, p. 270: 'Egli era l'esempio di quella calma spirituale propria di chi vive in un mondo superiore e non teme nulla'.

<sup>896</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 270: 'Eroe nel linguaggio della tradizione classica era non solo il nume tutelare di città o famiglie, ma anche il Maestro di Magia che aveva conseguito in vita e nel post-mortem l'immortalità'.

dying sun for the final salute, for the final rite; then he leant on the shelf with his right hand, bent his gigantic stature towards the Great Mother, his back straight; and he was free.<sup>897</sup>

Curiously, the epic tone of this story reminded me of the death of one of Reghini's bitter enemies: Julius Evola. Stories regarding his death are very similar, and a comparison to how both Traditionalists spent the last moments of their life is intriguing: in 1974, in his house in Corso Vittorio Emanuele 197 in Rome, Evola died while assisted by some of his closest friends and disciples. He had demanded to 'be brought "standing" [Evola had been confined to a wheelchair since being hit by shrapnel during bombings in Vienna in 1945], in front of the window facing the Gianicolo hill and there his strong fiber had surrendered'.<sup>898</sup> Mario Coen Belifanti (b. 1925), who had visited Evola just two days prior to his death, writes that the modality of his death was not a coincidence, but that Evola wanted to salute the sun one last time before his death.<sup>899</sup> Arturo Reghini is buried in the Budrio cemetery, his memorial plaque celebrating his ties to his two great loves: Pythagoreanism and Freemasonry.



Arturo Reghini's Memorial Plaque in Budrio  
© Associazione Culturale Ignis

<sup>897</sup> Parise, 'Nota', p. xiv: 'Il primo giorno del mese di Luglio del 1946, lo spirito di Arturo Reghini scioglieva i legami corporei e passava nell'Eterna Luce. Era la quinta ora pomeridiana. Il segno era apparso. Arturo Reghini si volse verso il sole declinante per l'ultimo saluto, per l'ultimo rito; poi si appoggiò con la destra al vicino scaffale, piegò la gigantesca statura verso la Grande Madre, eretto il busto: e fu libero'.

<sup>898</sup> Mario Coen Belifanti, 'Le Ultime Ore del Filosofo', in Julius Evola, *Il Cammino del Cinabro*, pp. 415-6: 'Essere portato "in piedi" davanti alla finestra di fronte al Gianicolo e lì la sua forte fibra aveva ceduto'.

<sup>899</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 416.

## CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSIVE REMARKS

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In the introductory chapter of the thesis, the core questions of the dissertation were enunciated and, for the reader's convenience, will be posed once more here: *How and why did Arturo Reghini react so vehemently to the modern, and what can the analysis of his writings offer to the on-going debate regarding the intricate relationship between occultism and modernity?*<sup>900</sup> Literature on the subject of the interaction between occultism and modernity oscillates wildly from the now out-dated view of occultism as one of the darkest faces of irrationalism (and therefore inherently bad) to the most recent rehabilitation of occultism as an 'enchantement à la mode', where a 'commitment to the Victorian notion of progress underwrote the entire occult enterprise'.<sup>901</sup> On the one hand Theodor Adorno warned his readers about this 'hallucinated phenomenon' and George Mosse followed suit by defining occultist circles as layers of 'the groundwork for the German form of XXth-century totalitarianism';<sup>902</sup> on the other, in the past fifteen years, a veritable sanitization of the occult has been seen within academic circles, tying it to more positive traits of modernity, 'verging [...] rather toward the progressive, liberal pole of the cultural and political spectrum', including the 'struggle for gender equality, a more open view on issues pertaining sexuality and a more nuanced version of the East, in many cases home of primordial mystical knowledge'.<sup>903</sup> If the first contingent of theorists wrote in the aftermath of World War II, and therefore conveyed the terror of war and of the Holocaust, which still haunted their minds, the second group of scholars seem to have swept the darker aspects of modernity under the rug, as it were, in order to legitimise the subject matter in an academic environment and move away from old the conceptions of the irrational.

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<sup>900</sup> See p. 7.

<sup>901</sup> Alex Owen, *The Place of Disenchantment*, p. 14.

<sup>902</sup> Adorno, 'Theses', p. 171.; George Mosse, 'The Mystical Roots of National Socialism', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 22:1 (1961), pp. 81-96 [96].

<sup>903</sup> Pasi, 'Modernity of Occultism', p. 63.

My contribution to this field of studies is therefore novel and crucial, in that it has demonstrated the existence of a manifestation of the occult, which defies both characterizations and hopefully will be recognised as a significantly important pole between the two extremes described above. As to the ideas of the first group of social scientists, the antimodern stance adopted by Reghini and the Roman Traditionalists is clearly antipositivist, against any idea of linear progress, and to a certain extent, irrational, in that it does not seek to link science and spirituality in a novel, *modern* fashion. Nevertheless, to entertain the idea that antimodern occult circles paved the way for the rise of Fascism is ludicrous: the Fascist entourage never viewed occult circles with favour, and the ban on secret societies in 1925 and the Concordat with the Vatican in 1929 went against all Reghini stood for: his correspondence with René Guénon, Amedeo Armentano and other Traditionalists, and his published books and articles have provided innumerable examples of Reghini's antimodern, pro-masonic and anti-Christian dispositions. If one of the two parties was ever eager to jump on one's bandwagon, it was the Roman Traditionalists, and certainly not Mussolini, whose affection towards the idea of imperial Rome was of a propagandistic nature, and not a spiritual one. The differences with the conclusions reached by authors like Alex Owen, Corinna Treitel and Marco Pasi, to cite only the most prominent scholars, who are involved in the contemporary debate on the intersection between occultism and modernity, could not be more evident, as the reader will see in the following paragraph. The above-mentioned authors have all dealt with mitteleuropean and north-European countries, and it is my opinion that because they have dealt with a different kind of modernity than the one manifested in southern European countries, the results are necessarily very different.

## **2. RESEARCH RESULTS.**

The first features to emerge, which bolster my hypothesis of the existence of an under-researched group of occultists, which do not fit into the Frankfurt School's nor in the contemporary scholars' paradigms may be found in the third chapter: during his stay within the Theosophical Society, often praised as promoting the vanguard of modern developments, Reghini developed the idea of a more localised research for his spiritual roots. From the universalism preached within the Society, which brought together yogic practices, Buddhist doctrines and predominantly

westernised racial theories, Reghini slowly embraced a more nationalistic approach to spiritual matters, which were to shape his occult career for the rest of his life. In the same chapter, I demonstrated how Reghini and his Florentine friends of the day also embraced avant-garde movements such as the Florentine *Scapigliatura*, and to a lesser degree, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti's Futurist movement: although I have stressed the importance of the research of previous Italian scholars, my focus has been on highlighting the aristocratic, elitist and anti-egalitarian aspect of these avant-garde movements: while Futurism, for example, was the exaltation of the modern, with its praise of speed, machines, progress, a more detached approach to this milieu by the early Roman Traditionalist must be stressed.

In the fourth chapter, a staple feature of Traditionalism is introduced to the forefront: that of a *philosophia perennis* of a distinct national flavour, spanning in an uninterrupted chain from Pythagoras to King Numa Pompilius, down to twentieth-century Italy. Such a school of Traditional knowledge is referred to by its adherents as *Schola Italica*, or Italic School, and is, in its most profound core, anti-modern, elitist, nationalist and oblivious to issues of equality between sexes, progress and universal solidarity. The teachings of the *Schola* were vehicled for a short span of time in the masonic *Rito Filosofico Italiano*, where the ancestral wisdom of Pythagoreanism and ancient Roman customs were to be taught to the members, rigorously male, even though some examples of Co-masonry (ie. with a mixed membership), with some limitations, already existed in Italy.<sup>904</sup>

The central section of the dissertation is devoted entirely to a detailed analysis of *Imperialismo Pagano*: in it, Reghini's, and the *Schola Italica*'s ideas on the tenets of Tradition and their interaction with nationalism, religion, identity and antimodern feelings are laid bare for the reader to view. First published in 1914, the article was republished in 1924, with the addition of a small introduction, but the text remained unchanged, and it is a fair assumption that the ideas of the *Schola Italica* proposed in Reghini's writings and Armentano's maxims remained unchanged at least from Reghini's initiation in 1910 until the year of the Lateran Concordat in 1929. The scorn towards any idea of progress in the modern age, the staunch anti-Christian stand, the

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<sup>904</sup> See, for example, Francesca Vigni, *Donna e Massoneria in Italia: dalle Origini ad Oggi* (Foggia: Bastogi Editrice Italiana, 1997).

fierce anti-egalitarian opening and the appeal to a Guénonian *elite intellectuelle* may all be found in this article, the most significant *summa* of Reghini's spiritual and political ideals, much like Julius Evola's *Orientamenti, Undici Punti (Orientations, Eleven Points, 1950)* would represent the Traditionalist's sum of his thoughts<sup>905</sup>

The themes of chapter six and seven may be considered together, as both sections deal with the more practical manifestations of Roman Traditionalist ideas: the three main events to characterise the movement in the 1920 are without doubt Mussolini's rise to power, which so enflamed the hearts of the Traditionalist milieu, with its imperial trappings and reference to ancient Rome and its grandeur; a first, brusque awakening in 1925 with the regime's approval of the Bodrero bill, which effectively outlawed secret societies and dealt a huge blow to the dream of recreating a masonic vehicle for Roman Traditionalist ideas and contributed to the voluntary exile of many of the core members of the *Schola*, including Amedeo Armentano; finally, the tangible experience of occult practices of the Ur Group, in which groups, or chains, of initiates worked secretly to steer Mussolini's ideas towards the neo-Pagan stance shared by the members of this secret coterie. Of course, as the reader has gleaned, all activities came to a halt when Mussolini decided to choose the Catholic religion as the regime's official religion, which would bind all Italians together in one homogeneous group. If there was one elite, which was reaping the benefits of its actions, it was the political one, not the intellectual, which tragically failed to achieve any standing success.

Chapter eight of the dissertation shows that Reghini, although banned from teaching in any state-controlled institutions, never lost his faith in his neo-Pythagorean ideals and published very interesting monographs in the 1930s and 1940s. These works give us a strong glimpse of Reghini's ideas on occultism, Pythagorean mathematics and other subjects, which only reinforce the Traditionalist, antimodern character of his thought, but essentially add very little to the overall picture described in the previous chapters and covering the more crucial years 1898-1929.

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<sup>905</sup> Julius Evola, *Orientamenti, Undici Punti* (Rome: Imperium, 1950).

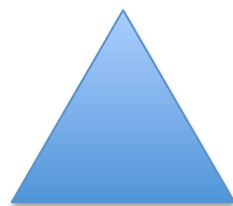


The appendix, an English translation of *Imperialismo Pagano*, in my opinion, is invaluable if the reader is in need of a reference to turn to over and over again during the reading of the dissertation, because of its clear exposition of Reghini's stance in matters of the *politeia* and the spirit.

In sum, in this dissertation I have argued that, far from what can be gleaned from the most recent scholarship in the field, the interaction between occultism and modernity is hardly always a progressive, positivist paradise, in which occult circles stand at the forefront of social emancipation. Indeed, my main argument has been that there were, and are, occult milieus which are reactionary, non-progressive, antipositivist, in a word: antimodern. By using Eisenstadt's theory of multiple modernities I have argued that, if a rose-tinted version of progressive occultism could have been a reality in more northern European countries, where the process of modernization had started sooner, the same cannot be said about countries in southern Europe, and especially Italy, which at the turn of the century was lagging behind most other European countries in both scientific fields and the humanities. By using Reghini's writings and those of other Traditionalists of the early part of the twentieth century as empirical material, I have defended these hypotheses and given example over example in order to bolster my main theoretical framework. The most significant result of my research is that of having pinpointed a dark, oft-neglected facet of occultism and modern society, which almost forms the point of a triangle, it being equidistant from Adorno's theory of occult irrationality and that of modern scholars' progressive occultism. Indeed, this neglected facet has yet to be researched in depth, and does not limit itself to the *Schola Italica*, or Italy: its appraisal will be attempted in the following paragraph, where some new avenues of research, heading in the same direction of this dissertation, are proposed.

### **The Different Approaches to Occultism in Academia**

*Antimodern Occultism*



*Occultism as Irrationality*

*Progressive Occultism*

### 3. POSSIBILITY FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

In discussing the rise of Fascism, which, as we have seen, Reghini initially viewed favourably, and its similarities and differences with the ascent of the National Socialist movement, Talcott Parsons describes the very first adherents to both as ‘including a “fundamentalist” revolt against the whole tendency of the rationalisation of the Western world.’<sup>906</sup> There are many ways in which the early twentieth-century fundamentalist movements may be associated with Reghini and his works, in my opinion, and the comparison between antimodern occult orders and early fundamentalist movements would provide a great opportunity to study the two phenomena from a new angle. Bruce B. Lawrence, in analysing common characteristics of fundamentalist movements, goes back to Berman’s idea that a modernist is he who makes himself at home ‘in the maelstrom, to make its rhythms one’s own, to move within its currents in search of the forms of reality [...]’<sup>907</sup> Lawrence also makes clear that although entertaining an inimical stance towards the modern world, fundamentalism, just as Traditionalist occultism, is a product of modernity, and thus the very ‘identity of fundamentalism [...] is shaped by the modern world. Fundamentalists [and Roman Traditionalists, in my opinion,] seem bifurcated between their cause and their outcome: they are at once a consequence of modernity and the antithesis of modernism.’<sup>908</sup> Through a thorough study of the research conducted by the *Fundamentalism Project*, culminating in a rigorous and academic collection of articles dealing with a wide array of fundamentalist movements, I have become convinced of the fruitfulness of an application of the theoretical framework of the study on fundamentalism on Reghini and the *Schola Italica*:<sup>909</sup> some of the core aspects of fundamentalism highlighted by the editor of the

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<sup>906</sup> Talcott Parsons, ‘Democracy and Social Structure in Pre-Nazi Germany’, in *Essays in Sociological Theory* (New York: Free Press, 1964), p. 123.

<sup>907</sup> Bruce B. Lawrence, *Defenders of God* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989), pp.1-2.

<sup>908</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>909</sup> *Fundamentalism Observed*, ed. by Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

*Fundamentalism Project*, R. Scott Appleby, in his theoretical opus, which capped the work as a whole, are an integral part of Reghini's thought and seem to positively echo the sentiments of the occultist's writings.<sup>910</sup> the reliance on conceptual resources from a previous tradition; episodes of activism; a vision of a new political order harkening from past traditions; a strong ethno-nationalistic fervour; the goal of a spiritual renewal within one's nation; the exploitation of media to promote the ideas and goals of the movement (in Reghini's case, his enormous output on occult journals of the day).<sup>911</sup> I have limited the list of characteristics which strongly resound with Reghini's milieu to these few points, but, as would be shown by further research, the similarities between the occultist's ideas and the aspects which, according to fundamentalism studies constitute a fundamentalist movement, would probably appear to be much more numerous.<sup>912</sup> The use of fundamentalism as a theoretical framework through which to view Reghini's writings and Roman Traditionalism as a whole, in my opinion, would be a vital key in reaching a deeper understanding of the goals, aspirations, modus operandi, worldly concerns and political affiliations of the Florentine thinker and his associates. Through the use of Lawrence, Appleby, Marty, Gabriel A. Almond, Emmanuel Sivan and their theories, a fresh, new angle could be given to the study of Reghini's Traditionalist writings and to Traditionalist studies in general.

There has been no previous research on occultism within the framework of fundamentalist studies. Therefore, in order to justify the link between the Reghini and fundamentalist manifestations, one could compare Reghini's circle to the fundamentalist reality which in my opinion, adheres closest to it: the Hindu Nationalist groups of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. Swami Dayananda Saraswati (1824-1883) and the early *Arja Samaj* and Vinayak Damodar Savakar's (1883-1966) *Hindutva* movements share much in common with Reghini's view of the world, and this aspect has hitherto only been hinted at by independent Traditionalist author Sandro Consolato. Just as Reghini considered figures like

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<sup>910</sup> Gabriel A. Almond, R. Scott Appleby, and Emmanuel Sivan, *Strong Religion: the Rise of Fundamentalisms around the World* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, 2003).

<sup>911</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xi.

<sup>912</sup> Also see Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, *The Glory and the Power: The Fundamentalist Challenge to the Modern World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992); Gabriel A. Almond, R. Scott Appleby and Emmanuel Sivan, *Strong Religion*.

Giuseppe Mazzini and Giuseppe Garibaldi almost as holy figures, who had fought to restore the age-old ideal of a united country, so did Hindu nationalists revere these two heroes of the Italian *Risorgimento*, to extremes which may appear puzzling, if not investigated in detail. Mazzini's influence on the movements for independence of India from the British rule was especially widespread: indeed, Gita Srivastava, author of *Mazzini and His Impact on the Indian National Movement* (1982), has argued that 'the influence of Italian nationalist leaders and Italian Risorgimento was felt by every nook and corner of India through the biographies of Italian patriots like Mazzini and Garibaldi in Indian vernacular language'.<sup>913</sup> Charismatic and influential exponents of the freedom movement, like Bipin Chandra Pal (1858-1932), found great similarities between the Austrian rule in early-twentieth century Italy and the British rule in India.<sup>914</sup> In Savarkar, future leader of the *Hindutva* movement we find the greatest similarities with Reghini's ideals: writing a rousing introduction to the *Maharathi* version of Mazzini's biography, he insisted on the strict link between a spiritual and a political revolution. Savarkar essentially was striving to teach 'ultimate truths and basic principles of politics' to his fellow countrymen'.<sup>915</sup> Young revolutionaries in India read the books of the very same people that Reghini and his circle held in the highest esteem in Italy, and, to offer but one example of their reverence, it is said that on 24 October 1907, Indian youths read Savarkar's *Mazzini* out loud during the *Dushera* festival, organising a procession which carried shrines showcasing a copy of the book and a portrait of their Italian hero.<sup>916</sup> The similarities between Savarkar and Reghini, when discussing ethno-nationalism, politics, spiritual matters, is uncanny, and would deserve further attention and research.

Two further avenues of research spring to mind, after having considered the Roman Traditionalists' milieu and Guénonian Traditionalism in general. On a more

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<sup>913</sup> Gita Srivastava, 'Historical Biographies of Italian Nationalist Leaders in Indian Literature During the Freedom Movement of India', in *Estratti della Rassegna storica del Risorgimento*, (1996). See also Vidya Sagar Anand, 'L'India di Mazzini nel Risorgimento Italiano', in *Il Pensiero Mazziniano* 6 (1969), pp. 47-51; Gita Srivastava, 'Svarkar and Mazzini', in *Rassegna Storica del Risorgimento* (1984), pp. 259-264; *Garibaldi, Mazzini e il Risorgimento nel Risveglio dell'Asia e dell'Africa*, ed. by Giorgio Borsa e P. Beonio Brocchieri (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1982).

<sup>914</sup> Bipin Chandra Pal, *Memoirs of my Life and Times*, vol. 1 (Calcutta: n.p., 1932), pp.243-246.

<sup>915</sup> Gita Srivastava, 'Svarkar and Mazzini', p. 260.

<sup>916</sup> Gita Srivastava 'Historical Biographies', p. 332.

specific and particular level, the correspondence between Guénon and Reghini highlights Guénon's utmost respect for the Italian Traditionalists. A study of the development of Guénon's ideas and Reghini's writings and thoughts could be fruitful in identifying the Italian Traditionalist milieu as a possible inspiration or sounding board for the development of ideas, which would, in time, influence thinkers such as Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy, Frithjof Schuon and contemporary Traditionalist thinkers such as Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Huston Smith.

On a more general level, the question of gender within the Traditionalist School, and the glaring lack of female representatives has also never been researched. As has been noted multiple times throughout the thesis, women seemed to have no active role in the development of Traditionalist ideas, and both the *Schola Italica* and the *Rito Filosofico Italiano* appear to have been restricted to male members only. In his *Against The Modern World*, scholar of Traditionalism Mark Sedgwick compiled a list of the 'seven most important Traditionalists', and to no surprise, no woman made the list. In a more general list of 'other important people', the only two women to make the cut are Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, hardly a Traditionalist in the Guénonian sense of the word, and Isabelle Eberhart (1877-1904), a Sufi and author, who has not left a significant legacy with regards to Traditionalist studies.<sup>917</sup> A study on the reasons behind a lack of female representatives within the so-called Traditionalist School of thought would be enlightening, when studying the domain of twentieth-century intellectual history.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Studies of Traditionalism and its close ties to occultism and to an antimodern view of life have been surprisingly few: authors such as Harry Oldmeadow, William W. Quinn Jr., a student under Mircea Eliade, all seem to be marred by a classic case of insider approach. Sedgwick's text is a welcome exception. Recent scholarship dealing with occultism and modernity, theoretically and methodologically sound, on the other hand, has been so bent on validating occultism as a legitimate subject of etic study, that the excessive zeal of some authors, repeatedly quoted during this

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<sup>917</sup> Sedgwick, *Modern World*, p. xiii-xiv.

dissertation, including Alex Owen, Marco Pasi and Corinna Treitel, has required a more balanced reassessment, which could bring out an under-researched, elitist, anti-egalitarian, anti-progress, idealist, nationalist, identity-conscious dimension to occultism, which, until today, had only been grossly misinterpreted and belittled by sociologist writing sixty to seventy years ago. It is my conviction that this dissertation may be amongst the first of many tassels of the mosaic composing this crucial re-evaluation of lesser-known antimodern occult currents belonging to the earlytwentieth century.

*FINIS*

## **APPENDIX:**

### **IMPERIALISMO PAGANO**

**BY ARTURO REGHINI**

**ATANÒR 1:3, pp. 69-85**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

In the recent political elections, universal suffrage, extreme corollary of democratic postulates, has brought us to the triumph of oversimplification. The two parties, thus, who have seen their votes rise the most, are without doubt the clerical and the socialist. Evident sign that the arguments and the promises utilised were by nature more accessible and welcomed by the vast, illiterate majority of voters, much more than the ideas of other parties could. The farmers of [71] Veneto and Brianza, whose primitive soul is governed by the priest who uses and abuses of their strong christian faith and helps himself if in need with the less spiritual topic of the catholic banks; the farmers of Emilia and Romagna and the workers of the great city, having drunk at the inexhaustible spring of clichés by now polluted by democratic eloquence, reducing everything to their narrow class selfishness in order to gain an immediate miserable gain, proud of having evolved, convinced they represent Progress, the new fantastic God. Both strong because of sheep-like discipline and the strength of numerous leagues, they have used their sovereign right voting for the two great internationalist parties.

Illiteracy, oversimplification and internationalisation, bound together, have therefore won to the greater glory of the parliamentary regime.

On the other hand the nationalist party, though emerging victorious from some of the battles; was not able to obtain a success proportional to the strength which in the past few years has awakened in the italian national consciousness. What happened to that overwhelming nationalist tide which wanted the (turkish-italian) war and that elevated Italy from the degrading and humiliating condition of Cinderella among nations? If

we do not want to believe that all this energy has simply vanish in thin air, we must admit that it was not able to express itself because of the conditions of parties in Italy, being there no party to this date in Italy with which the national conscience can identify itself trustingly. And truthfully that party that defines itself nationalist does not give the italian soul any assurance on its absolutely italian character; the deep intuition of race isn't persuaded, and hesitates and refuses to call itself nationalist if nationalist must mean clerical.

Instinctively we do not trust nationalists or clericals. The change has been too fast, too smooth, not to stink like a machination at a first sniff. We do not want to bore the reader by repeating extremely well-known facts; still we may not abstain from bringing up the aversion of our and foreign clericals towards our country; in Belgium, in Austria, Spain, Germany in their congresses the eternal italian question was debated; only yesterday the [72] Secretary of State was protesting against the jailer, and still the tears of the faithful for the imprisonment, with added straw, of the Pope. And now, all of a sudden, changes ahoy; to the faithful in S. Peter's square who shout long live the Pope-King, Pius X himself gestures for them to be silent, an archbishop in a clearly official speech, which cannot diminish in worth because of recent repentance, declares that the time of temporal vindications is past, the clericals monopolise nationalism; everywhere at the hands of clericals new journals are born, weeklies, daily papers with nationalist flag. Has the monk become the devil? Already one other time we witnessed a Pope asking God to bless Italy, and he was probably sincere. But it was a short agreement, with no consequences. The Papacy is an essentially international institution, openly catholic, clericals in the everyday political life of people represent the army of this institution; to become nationalists is for them to lose their own nature. Therefore we do not believe in the sincerity of this sudden change, from which very evidently the jesuit command transpires; and in any case because of a natural fatality of things we don't think it will last long; and lastly, sincere or not, we see in it a damage and a danger for the future of Italy.

It is not hard, after all, to guess which considerations must have brought the company of Jesus to this apparent change of politics regarding Italy.



The international and national conditions made this move appropriate and almost essential.

France, precious ally against Italy in the days of Leo XIII, once the nationalist clerical military attempt failed because of the unlucky Dreyfus affair, is today in the hands of Freemasonry; and, if it takes action against Italy, it does it through *Palazzo Giustiniani* and democracy, and not through the Vatican. Austria certainly doesn't procure itself these problems; the clerical party here is very strong at court, in the army, in bureaucracy: the hereditary archduke and the not so princely consort are in great relationships with the Company, Austria after all is always old Austria; but it has too many internal issues and too many threats along the borders to be able to afford a policy that goes against Italy. In Spain it is necessary that willingly or unwillingly, Alphonse XIII show himself [73] liberal if he doesn't want to end up like his colleague in Lisbon; and the formation of a Poland [that may be] independent, catholic, and with a king possibly from the Habsburg house, doesn't seem to close. On the other hand atheism, materialism, socialism spread through the working masses and even among the farmers of Europe more and more.

Bad times are upon us! And the progress of Catholicism in protestant countries is a meagre consolation for so many ailments: in Germany where the Emperor needs the votes of the Catholic Centre; in England and the United States where the Catholic cult, more *picturesque* than the various protestant cults, is continuously gaining ground.

On the other hand, Italy has witnessed two important unexpected changes. War with its associated diplomatic competitions, which has awakened the nationalist feeling of the country; and universal suffrage which has brought to participate in political activities most of the uneducated and malleable mass of the country. Wouldn't it be a masterstroke, must have said the old foxes of the Papal *Curia*, if, instead of continuing asking from an ever-increasingly strong Italy a always less-probable restitution (!), we tried to direct the unexpected events in our favour and little by little we took over of the hole of Italy and of Rome? We have a clergy, young and combative, who doesn't allow to be overpowered by the fireworks of socialist orators; it will be able to recruit columns over columns of farmers; we will exploit the great

renaissance of nationalism taking advantage of the universal economic infatuation of all democratic parties, which in order to shout out their sacrosanct principles of '89 are so blind as to go against the contingencies of reality, and so kind as to leave us the monopoly over this great current; count Gentiloni will take it upon himself to import in Italy the secret-pact system which worked so well for us in the United States; and the ship of S. Peter will be able to sail even with a stormy sea and an obstinately unfavourable wind. In this way even the biggest trouble to have ever hit the Church of Rome, the formation of Italy as a united and independent nation, will end up benefiting us.

The Church is not wrong, therefore, if it deems exploiting nationalism convenient. What needs to be seen is if and how much this selfless help may help the non-clerical nationalists.

#### **[74] EMPIRE AND CHRISTENDOM**

We have already said that we do not believe in the sincerity of clerical nationalism. We do not believe in it because we know all too well about the wily schemes of our enemies, and because it is all too evident for which personal interest and necessity they have been forced into this masquerade. May nobody come and speak to us about Catholics that are not clerical. The mentality, the sentimentalism, the faith of a catholic are grounds too fertile for the intensive cultivation of clericalism for it to be slept on; priests exert such an ascendant upon the believers' character that, as and when necessary, they will always be able to do whatever they want with the uncivilized and faithful masses, and it would be then but a mere consolation to realise that the distinction between catholic and clerical would have allowed some semi-independent figure to act independently.

A nationalist must desire the good of the nation above all other things. Adding or implying the adjective catholic shows the existence of a mental restriction, shows that it desires the good of the nation if and because it works in favour of a certain particular credence. Therefore one may be a sincere nationalist only if the two purposes are never at odds with each other.

Now in our case there is a natural, fatal, deep, irreconcilable contrast. In the long course of the centuries from the foundation of the Church of Rome onwards, Papacy, forever and ever, has been the natural enemy of Rome and of Italy.

Latin civilization, eclectic, serene, open, in a word 'gentile', and together with it, the roman empire were smothered by the exotic, intolerant, fanatical, dogmatic mentality of Christendom.

And this is a crime that still awaits its expiation.

Vergil, the great imperial poet, had but just sung about the return to the golden age

### **Jam redit et Virgo, redeunt Saturnia regna**<sup>918</sup>

And prophesied the arrival of a 'hound' which the destroyers of the Vergilian idea have had the impudence to associate with Jesus: so [75] here we have a hypochondriac and sentimental megalomaniac, whose vision of the world created by his God, moved to compassion and tears, thought himself the first and only sage who appeared in this valley of tears, and made the farfetched discovery that to accommodate the lot of mankind it was necessary to only make men better. Having found this out, all that was left was to persuade them to love each other.

Less wise than Faust he illuded himself that he knew what was necessary to teach.

### **Die Menschen zu bessern und zu bekehren**<sup>919</sup>

And so began that nefarious predication of love for one's neighbour and of Christian charity, honey- and liqueur-based universal cure-all, true manna for all the sentimental languors of humanity. This preaching should would have enjoyed inevitable success: as a matter of fact, the paradise promised to the faithful, a blessed future life in which the wrongs of this life would have been made right and the evils compensated, assured by the preachings of a meek Jesus, the consensus of those who felt the mental need to validate the regularity of a divine justice made in the image and likeness of their miserable human criterion.

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<sup>918</sup> 'Already doth the Virgin return, the Reign of Saturn returns', Vergil, Eclogue 4, v. 6.

<sup>919</sup> 'To improve and convert Mankind' Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Faust, ed. by A. Wilbrandt (Padeborn: Salzwasser Verlag, 2014 [1895], p.19.

There will be occasion to examine the splendours of christian charity and the merits of love towards one's neighbour. The theological hatred, the blind fanaticism, the persecutions, the excommunications, the religious wars unknown to the pagan humanity, were the natural consequences of this mad propaganda. The fault of men our Christian readers will possibly claim; Jesus's fault we say, for if he had really been wise he would should have predicted that human beings would never have been able to practice his superhuman maxims. To do so, they should have stopped being men, and it is impossible to change what they are by persuading them what not to be.

But let us go back to our main argument and see how and why the first Roman emperors failed to defend the empire from the Christian peril.

The first emperors maybe never understood the particular nature of this danger. Used to the most serene tolerance of all cults and sects, which coexisted and [76] peacefully prospered side by side without proselytism and claims of monopoly, they never thought (either) that in some crazy mind the absurd idea could form that truth could be attained and happiness conquered by just following a religion. No pagan cult had ever laid such claims; and in all antiquity in Rome and in other places wisdom was not obtained through belief and cults, but participating in the Mysteries.

Moreover, the state, essentially lay, estranged itself from the various cults, and founded its administrative wisdom upon social necessities and pure law.

A law free from any kind of religious idea, it did not rely on any theoretical morals from postulates and prejudices; but it was based rested upon a healthy empirical knowledge of the practical necessities of life.

*'Neminem laedere, unicuique suum tribuere, honeste vivere'*; <sup>920</sup> without the scaffolding of religious or philosophical morals, without classifications of good and evil.

The state in this way stood above all cults, and its authority had no limits. Even that small, greedy and riotous people, who did not believe it impossible that the Lord God had for it a special predilection, closed itself in its haughty conviction and did not feel

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<sup>920</sup> 'Harm no one, give one his due, live honestly', attributed to Gnaeus Domitius Annianus Ulpianus's lost *Regulae*.

the sting of the propaganda. How could one imagine that a man, exciting the sentimental hysteria, dulling the intelligence, promising the earth, sea and sky and even heaven to those who would have followed him blindly, could create the missionary mania, that is the holy zeal of the spirit of proselytism?

When the emperors became aware of this new reality, it was too late. The infection had spread throughout the Empire, it had reached Rome; and fire and brimstone used even more generously than was the norm could not have saved the West. Thus while the pax romana assured a great part of humanity a condition of wealth and happiness which, according to Gibbon, was never reached again, throughout the empire the inundation of milk and honey spread.

A morbid mysticism drowned the healthy and serene Italian practicality, the italic 'prudencia',<sup>921</sup> and the roman eagle, used to [77] long flights, got its claws (all) sticky in the (sticky) sweetness of universal love. The greatest part of the strength of Rome was to be found in its proud, realistic, hard and austere character of the Roman citizen. And the tender and innocent bleat of the Christian lamb was not what was needed to keep at bay the barbarians who were pushing at the borders.

It is not enough either. Establishing itself solidly in Rome, the new religion snatches, turning it to its benefit, the strength itself and the ascendant inherent to the land, the air, the sacred name of Rome. It stole from the ancient and indigent cult of Janus, the keys and the shuttle of St. Peter; it stole from archaic Masonic symbolism the name of the high priest himself, usurping the name and the functions of the pontifex maximus; and almost as if to hide its insane original exoticism it proclaimed itself Roman.

The first effect of the Christian predominance and of the servitude of the imperial authority to the new authority was the abandonment of the unitarian pythagorean idea of the Roman state through the creation of the Eastern Empire. And, soon after, a great number of misfortunes: the fall of the Western Empire, of political unity and of the sense of Italian national unity lost for centuries to come, the shipwreck of culture, of thought, of literature, of arts: Christian barbarism in sum was substituted by pagan civilization. Rightly so did Dante (Par. XX) say that the world was in such a way destroyed by Constantine.

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<sup>921</sup> *Prudentia* may be translated as wisdom or knowledge.

And let us not cast upon the barbarians the responsibility of such ruin: for during the first centuries of the 'vulgar' era Alexandria was the center of graeco-roman culture; and it wasn't the Vandals or the Visigoths who destroyed the Library and the Museum and persecuted and killed the neoplatonist and the gnostics, the mathematicians and the hermetists.

## **THE ROMAN IMPERIAL TRADITION**

Once established in Rome with its dual authority, spiritual and temporal, the Catholic Church, necessarily had to oppose with all its strength the rise of any political authority in Rome independent from it.

It looked like the church could exist uncontested. [78] Christianity had spread through the great part of Europe, and every remain of pagan community had disappeared; the barbarian kings' efforts to reconstitute a united Italy had failed, as had the efforts of the byzantine kings to re-instate imperial authority in Italy; the sects and the heresies weren't born yet or prosperous enough, and the idea of the empire was but a memory. Even historical events took it upon them to make its necessity felt.

Another religion, stemming from judaism and christianity, threatened Asia. Muslim fanaticism did not pale in comparison to its christian counterpart; from the remotest Araby the asian hordes made their way up towards Europe, and as they marched along they converted and conquered people with the persuasion of the scimitar.

In the East the Empire held its stance and resisted against the islamic fury; in the West, once Africa had been conquered, the arabs threatened the islands and all the coasts of the peninsula, broke through in Spain and crossed the Pyrenees. The perception of danger made a political unity feel necessary even for the West, and thus the Empire sprung back to life. The capital though was not in Rome, and the authority of the Papacy wasn't threatened; on the other hand the Empire could not avoid basing its tenets on the catholic faith which was then universally accepted in Italy, in France and in the greater part of Germany. But the marriage between Catholic church and Roman Empire was essentially against nature, and would repeat itself only once more,

with Carl V, and last very little. Meanwhile, the idea of the roman empire, put in practice by Charlemagne, was by now ingrained in the minds of the people, and little by little became the last hope of all heretics, the final aim of all the secret societies that from the year one thousand to the four hundreds took hold in all of Europe. The history of this great period is not entirely unwritten, but certainly misunderstood. It is impossible to penetrate within the true spirits of the revolutions of that time without knowledge of gnosticism, manicheanism, of the paganism of almost all of the heresies of the day, without having divined the mystical and political secret of knighthood, without having understood the gay science of the troubadours, and the language and symbolism of the secret societies, and without having found the links which intertwined together the heretics and the ghibellines, the lombards and the natives of Toulouse, monks, trobadours and knights of the Temple.

[79] The church, painted as the apocalyptic beast of babylonian abomination by troubadour and love poets (including Dante), felt greatly threatened, and defended itself by every mean. The first apostles

**made shields and lances out of the gospel<sup>922</sup>**

But the bloody hands of S. Dominic and his peers used real swords to propagate the christian faith and charity. The fire and iron had overcome the heresy from Toulouse; fraud and torture and the inquisition toppled the vastly powerful Order of the Temple, which threatened to overturn all at once from its foundation the temporal and spiritual authority of the Church of Rome.

The onslaught had been terrible, the defence ruthless. The greatest of italians was scared and suffered for this, and invoked the help of the Emperor and the vengeance of God.

With Dante the monarchic roman-pythagorean ideal, which had become the italic imperialist tradition, became visibly aware of itself. This great idea ties between them Numa, Pythagoras, Caesar, Vergil, Augustus, Dante, and the other great italians who came at a later date.

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<sup>922</sup> Dante Alighieri, *La Divina Commedia: Paradis*, Canto 29, v. 114: 'Dell'Evangelio féron scudi e lance'.

And those catholic nationalists who want to put Dante across as a christian as if he almost had never been persecuted and prosecuted as a heretic, and who pride themselves in not doubting the orthodoxy of Dante's imperialism, as if the *De Monarchia* itself hadn't been indexed by the church, may they look for another Christopher Columbus to parade as a catholic glory to humankind!

Because Dante, by the great Jove and the good Apollo, was not a catholic and his imperialism was pagan and roman!

As he himself writes, his only master is Vergil, but he himself had

**already seen human corpses alight**<sup>923</sup>

living torches for the greater glory of the meek and forgiving Lord, knew his value, and did not certainly want to vainly surrender his great work in sacrifice; necessity forced him to become christian, but it wasn't but a great Comedy.

He is pagan and never misses a chance to make us [80] catch a glimpse of it; right from the first canto of the sacred poem Dante invokes the Sun, divine Apollo, initiator of Hercules and Aeneas; and it is well know how the Divine Comedy relies on the sixth book of the Aeneid.

In both we see the same isagogy, the allegorical and sometimes categorical exposition of the metamorphosis of man in God; politically, after all, do nothing more than exalt the Roman Empire.

The ever-present enemy, perennial object of Dante's formidable invective is the Church, symbolised by the wolf in the inferno, by the apocalyptic beast in purgatory; and while he finds the way to cast down to hell even the two popes still-living during his mystical voyage, he does not use the words heretic and catholic but only once in the whole poem, almost trying to dodge the accusation of having avoided them on purpose, as one avoids those who are sick.

All the defeats and the imperialist and ghibelline misfortunes cause him to suffer. One has the feeling that he curses the ill-fated and mysterious tragedy which took from

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<sup>923</sup> idem, *La Divina Commedia: Purgatorio*, Canto 27, v. 18: 'umani corpi già veduti accesi'.



Frederick his minister; Manfredi and Conrad have all his sympathy. And for the killing of Conrad and the treason against the templars as soon as he can he hurls abuse at France, the Capetins, the house of Angiò and especially at Philip the Fair.

Naturally Dante could in no way drag Vergil with him in Heaven. His guides, as is well known, follow one another in this order: Vergil, pythagorean and imperialist; Statius whom he named Toulousan 'motu proprio', a simple hypostasis of Vergil; Beatrice, symbol of philosophy, and finally St. Bernard.

St. Bernard, so orthodox, at a first glance, deserves such honours for having founded the rule of the Templars. Dante, who does not forget to define him 'contemplator', dresses him with the white vestments, the garb of the knights templar; the very same item of clothing worn by the blessed who constitute the rose of Heaven around the big templar cross; and seeing this immense cross he speaks these meaningful words:

'As he who is silent but really wants to speak

Beatrice drew me to her and said: Look at

The size of the crowd in white stoles!'<sup>924</sup>

where the word 'convento' is the technical traditional term for the great reunion of secret societies, and it just right to [81] use it when talking of white stoles; and the whole vision brings to mind Valentinus's gnostic prayer.

**Oh come, sweet visions to the white stoles.**<sup>925</sup>

The two great symbols of Heaven are the eagle, the sacred bird which made the Romans to be revered by the world, and the rosy-cross, which is not the mystical rose but the sectarian rose of the 'Roman del la rose', where the art of love is all hidden, and the fundamental symbol of the mysterious fraternity of the rosy-cross, and of the 18th degree of the Scottish rite.

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<sup>924</sup> idem, *La Divina Commedia: Paradiso*, Canto 30, vv. 127-9: 'qual è colui che tace e dicer vuole/ mi trasse Beatrice, e disse: mira/ quanto è il convento delle bianche stole'.

<sup>925</sup> Reghini describes this as a verse from Valentinus's gnostic prayer: 'Adeste visions stolis albis candidae'. See Gastone Ventura, *Cosmogonie Gnostiche*, *Saggio Storico-Critico sulle Principali Teogonie Gnostiche Cristiane* (Rome: Atanòr, 1975).

The emperor earned his title by divine right, and since Dante made the legitimacy of the germanic emperor derive from that of divine Augustus, who had certainly not received it from the Pope, it follows that even spiritually imperial authority was independent from that of the Pope. One should only read the *De Monarchia* and compare it with Cicero's *De Republica* (Book I-XXXVII and Book II-XXIII) to realise that both support the thesis of the excellency of monarchic (universal) rule over any other basing their assumptions on the great pythagorean unitarian principle; like Cicero and like Vergil, Dante was faithful to the great immortal tradition of the *Scuola Italica*, chronologically and essentially antichristian.

But we will focus in more detail on Dante's paganism and imperialism some other time.

## **THE IMPERIAL IDEA AFTER DANTE**

The great Florentine died in exile never seeing his hopes and prayers fulfilled by Henry of Luxembourg

The Church triumphed, the guelphs took an uncontested lead in Italy, and the blossoming of the italian communes, of the republics of Venice and Florence especially made it impossible to accomplish the imperial ideal and political unity of Italy.

The idea did not disappear. The great spirits kept their faith. Petrarch, the singer of Cola di Rienzi, carried on the tradition. We make a passing mention, and we direct the reader towards a wider treatment of the roman imperialism of Petrarch by Bartoli (*Storia della Letter. Italiana* 1884 – Vol. VII, pag 135-146).

[82] Machiavelli, who saw the perils of a political divide in Italy, while other peoples constituted political unity, asked for a prince who would know how and would want to complete the unification. He too took inspiration from roman imperialism, as has been noticed by Villari (*N. Machiavelli* – Vol III, pag 370-82, Ediz. 1877).

But just like Dante had not seen the Vatican wolf die while giving birth, Machiavelli too died without a prince who would listen to him; and the Machiavellian politics were later taken up and applied by the Company of Jesus to the harm and not to the benefit of Italy and of the imperialist idea.

In the meantime neo-platonic humanism and the later rise of experimental sciences, and the revolt against Aristotelianism especially by the hands of the southern neo-Pythagoreans Bruno, Telesio, Campanella, gave way to the western lay culture, which is slowly disinfecting Christianity from the European mentality.

These mystics of the senses, these precursors and inventors of European philosophers, were not some lazy saints who would take refuge in a Thebaides or a hermitage; they were fiery and brave men of action. Campanella, alone, misunderstood, at a time in which the sun never set on the domains of the most Christian Spain, first dared to put into practice the ideal of his monarchy, not Christian of course, as written in his *Città del Sole*, seeking help even among the Turks. Betrayed, tried, tortured by the same Reverend Jesuit Fathers who took care of Giordano Bruno with great zeal, he never betrayed himself or change his mind, and, buried for twenty seven years in a rotting cell, he carried on hoping and prophesising the accomplishment of his great ideal.

Campanella died in Paris and as if to give a tangible manifestation of the occult tie that binds men and things across the ages, from the house in which he died came the first voice of the French revolution. The Revolution which was the result, it is known, of the practical intervention of secret societies, freemasonry and the illuminati more than others, all animated by a very profound antichristian sentiment. But what is unknown is in what part the work of another great Italian which the Jesuit skill and calumny made him pass as a charlatan. We talk about Giuseppe Balsamo better known as the Count of Cagliostro, the wonderful representative [83] of Italian esotericism. To be convinced of this one need only remember his absolutely unassailable prophecy of the conquest and destruction of the Bastille which had been made in London by Cagliostro himself, and one need only think of the touching concern of the French Masonic officials, when, in 1797, they passed by San Leo, and above all of the fierce fury of Catholic authors even to this day who are against him.

The authors of the Rivista Massonica of the Grand Orient of Italy who aren't ashamed to print the disgusting lies against Cagliostro circulated by the Jesuits around the time of his trial in Rome, should rather study the magnificent and well documented recent work by Dr Marc Haven before reviling the memory of one of their great brothers! They would then begin to see why those contemporaries who knew him called him the divine Cagliostro.

Another Italian piloted and dominated the French revolution, and from the immense energy which it unleashed became an instrument to create the empire. Indeed one must observe, as Carducci writes, 'that what Dante only thought to do, another Italian, Napoleon I tried in his own way to put into effect. And if Carducci had realised how right Foscolo's claim had been, that Dante wanted to establish a new religious school in Europe, he probably wouldn't have hated, pagan as he was, Dante's holy empire.

Yet again, the roman eagle flew high with the Napoleonic legions, even in the captive provinces Italy was freed again, latinity triumphed and Rome had a King once more. This was the Roman imperial ideal, pagan even despite the mistake of the Concordat, which after many centuries amidst the fire of the revolution built a united Italy.

Once the Empire fell, Catholic, Lutheran and orthodox Christianity came back with the Holy Alliance to weigh upon the whole of Europe. But it was only a short break. Napoleon was not dead yet, and already two generous youths entertained in their minds the ancient immortal ideal. What profound roots the faith in the imperial idea had in the soul of Giuseppe Mazzini, anyone with some familiarity with the Genoan seer's writings will know well.

He too, like Vergil and Dante, who loved, studied and understood more than many illustrious professors, said that Italy had been destined by God to rule over peoples, to give from Rome to the world the light of [84] a third civilization; he proclaimed the name and the soil of Rome as sacred, and in 1849 was eager to defend it together with Garibaldi, from the French and the Austrians united to uphold Catholicism.

Giuseppe Garibaldi always held Rome highly in his thoughts, he thought about Rome while fighting at Volturno, about Rome in '62 and '67; and disbanding his legion in San Marino, he said 'about Rome, we will see each other again in Rome'. His motto

‘Either Rome or death’ shows how clear in him the transcendental importance of Rome was for the destiny of Italy.

Oh! Were it that the example of these two great figures, not suspected of Christianity, was followed by those republicans who have abandoned mazzinian spiritualism for the materialist theories imported from Germany, and who throw away the great idealistic force of the italic tradition in order to mimic the socialists, who care only about secondary and transitory economic issues!

Oh! Were it that the word of Mazzini, who admonished the Italians not to trust France ‘dangerous for the sympathy it inspires among us’, was heard by those democrats who on the altar of the god-given principles of eighty nine, and in the name of a latin fraternity always in France’s favour, try to hinder, every time that Italy is forced to defend its rights and its destinies from such arrogance which comes from the other side of the Alps!

But today democratic freemasonry dreams of a confederation of latin republics led, obviously, by France, with the fateful city of Berne as a capital, just in order to make the internationalist idiots happy; and Mazzini may be read by Indian and Polish revolutionaries, since they seem to care!

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In this short overview we have often been compelled to use simple sentences or (to) incomplete examples; but what we really cared about was to show in a synthetic vision the immutable paganism of Italian imperialism.

From what we have seen, it is clear that to enact a catholic nationalism is equal to tearing away a three thousand-year-old tradition, purely italic, just to cater to the interest of an exotic religion, deeply repugnant to all sense of romanity, and which has always been the bane of Italy over the past two thousand years.

[85] *But the attempt is politically wrong; because the fleeting conditions of today’s parties do not matter in the face of secular and fated revolutions of the spirits; and a sharp and artificial deviation cannot change the direction of the great courses of history.*

*Nationalism and catholicism are antithetical terms even on an ethimological basis! Historically and intrinsically a catholic nationalism is an absurdity! We invite those sincere Italians to not give credence to the Roman Church's tricks; and to constitute a lay, pagan, ghibelline imperialist party which takes inspiration from the italic tradition of Vergil, Dante, Campanella, Mazzini.*

The rest may do what they like. We know they cannot win, our faith in the destiny of the Eternal City makes us certain of this, and to the known and the hidden enemies of pagan imperialism we remind them and will remind them of the latin sentence:

**'Fate leads the willing, drags the unwilling'.<sup>926</sup>**

**Arturo Reghini**

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<sup>926</sup> Lucius Annaeus Seneca, *Epistles to Lucilius*, 107, 11, 5: 'Ducunt volentem fata, nolentem trahunt'.



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