

12

Francesco Saverio Salfi and the Eulogy for Antonio Serra: Politics, Freemasonry, and the Consumption of Culture in the Early 19th Century

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1 Francesco Saverio Salfi: his life between Naples and Milan

Francesco Saverio Salfi published his eulogy on Antonio Serra in 1802 in Milan.¹ Although this might seem like the customary formal tribute, the text is actually full of far greater significance, of relevance to the political climate and the Italian and French Masonry of the beginning of the 19th century, as well as the Neapolitan culture of Antonio Genovesi and Gaetano Filangieri. The aim of the present work is to illustrate the social and Masonic context in which the eulogy on Serra was written and the role and character of Francesco Saverio Salfi.

Who was Francesco Salfi? He was born in Cosenza – the same Southern Italian city where Antonio Serra was born – on 1 January 1759 – and he died in Paris on 3 September 1832. His family lived in quite humble conditions, and he was placed under a widow's charge before being started on the ecclesiastic career. During the seminary period, he came across texts by H elvetius, d'Alembert, and Rousseau, and the doctrines of the Southern adherents of the Enlightenment. He was consecrated in 1781, but differences with the curia led him to move to Naples in 1785. He then met some local exponents of the Enlightenment, in particular Francesco Mario Pagano and Gaetano Filangieri, and in 1787 published the *Saggio sui fenomeni antropologici*

relativi al tremuoto (Essay on the anthropological phenomena related to the earthquake), an earthquake which devastated various areas of Calabria in 1783). Meanwhile, in Naples, he joined a group of friends and co-operators who had connections with the first minister, J. Fr. Acton, through Vicar General of the Kingdom Don Francesco Pignatelli of the Princes of Strongoli. From then on, Salfi became very active in promoting the interests of the king against the curia, and he also wrote *Allocuzione del Cardinale N. N. al papa (Formal address of the Cardinal N.N. to the Pope)* and *Riflessioni sulla corte romana (Reflection on the Roman Court)*, both published in 1788.²

Like Francesco Mario Pagano, Salfi became popular as a playwright, especially for his works with jurisdictional themes (*Corradino, Giovanna Regina di Napoli*, c. 1789–1790). For this reason, he came under the control of the political authorities.³ As in the case of many other Neapolitan exponents of the Enlightenment, the behaviour of the government towards him changed considerably upon exacerbation of the control that Ferdinand IV wielded over Neapolitan cultural life from autumn 1789 onwards. Thanks to the help of Acton in 1793, Salfi continued to receive the benefits of the abbey of San Nicola from Majoli, in Maida (Catanzaro), and also continued writing for the king's theatre until 1794.⁴ Nevertheless, since he had joined many patriotic associations and had become a suspicious figure, he was obliged to flee Naples in 1795 to avoid arrest.⁵ He went into hiding in Capri, where he left the priesthood, then in Genoa and Pavia, where he founded the "Società popolare" (People's Society). In spring 1796 he moved to Milan, immediately after the town had been occupied by the Napoleonic troops. He was appointed department head of the ministry of foreign affairs, started working as a journalist, and became one of the main columnists for the newspaper *Termometro politico della Lombardia*. Moreover, he also dedicated himself to the creation of a patriotic theatre repertoire with a marked pedagogic and propaganda bent. After a short period in Brescia (summer–autumn 1797), probably due to expulsion, Salfi went back to Milan, and at the beginning of 1798, he became department head of the education ministry.⁶

The year after, specifically 1799, he was called back to Naples as secretary general of the temporary government of the Neapolitan Republic. This proved to be another fundamental experience for Salfi in that he was able to take part in the discussions on and birth of the first Italian democratic constitution, the famous Constitutional Project for the Neapolitan Republic by Francesco Mario Pagano.

2 Constitutionalism and good government

The history of the Italian constitutions of the democratic triennium seems to be strictly related to the series of political events which accompanied the changes that Italy had to undergo after the French invasion. Government of the new-born republics was almost everywhere assigned to the moderates, and discussion on the constitutional projects tended to end up with imitations of the French constitution of the year III. Even the most creative adaptations – for example, in the case of religious policy – appeared to be extremely moderate. In some cases, the constitutions were simply imposed by the French (as in Rome); in some others, local legislative committees were asked to produce one (as in Naples). In the case of the Ligurian Republic, the preparatory works show that the most radical parts of the original project were emended by the moderates.

According to some interpretations, the constitutional process was slowed down and made difficult almost everywhere by the problem of the abolition of feudalism – very often implemented with a series of compromises, bringing in laws guaranteeing the old feudal vassals their allodial property. But even where feudalism was completely abolished – as in Naples, for example – the problems of actually putting the laws into force dramatically reduced their application in practice.

Salfi was present in Naples while discussion of two main subjects was carried out: first of all, the matter of the economic and political reforms dependent on the abolition of feudalism; second, the creation of a constitutional project which had necessarily to be far from the French constitutions, because it had to be adapted to the specific conditions of the Neapolitan area and, furthermore, because it had to embody the great legacy of the Southern Enlightenment doctrines, from Serra to Vico, from Genovesi to Filangieri.

Actually, one of the main factors behind the genesis and the events related to the *Progetto di costituzione per la repubblica napoletana* lay in the possibility of studying its significance by taking a comparative approach, as many contemporaries were suggesting. The press and public opinion not only gave the measure of actual tensions but also highlighted the difficulties entailed with the democratic debate, which were also registered by Giuseppe Abamonti in his *Saggio sulle leggi fondamentali dell'Italia libera* (*Essay on the fundamental laws of free Italy*) written in Oneglia, the town where democratic debate leading to the Ligurian constitutional project was underway. The large quantity of Ligurian newspapers and

constitutional clubs represent evidence of the debate that accompanied the constitutionalization process, and on 16th February 1799 the “Gazzetta nazionale della Liguria” published an article entitled *Genova e Napoli (Genoa and Naples)*, in which the author compared the two Republics, underlining the role of the feudal yoke in slowing down the peoples’ regeneration process. These difficulties were all the greater in Naples, where the population was also more indolent.

The situation in Naples was in a way mirror-like. The first discussions on the possibility of introducing a constitution for the Republic were doubtless carried out while closely following the events unfolding throughout Italy, even though there are no written records left to prove this. Nevertheless, the hypothesis is prompted by the intense printing activity of the two brothers Vincenzo and Gennaro De Simone, who also probably published the work by Pagano. At the beginning of 1799 – for some months – they printed a series of treatises that contained the texts of what were clearly considered the most important European constitutions – namely the constitutions of France (year III), the Cisalpine Republic, and the Roman Republic, as well as the constitutional project of the Ligurian Republic. Thanks to this project, the printing house (also known as the Simoniana Printing House) was simply carrying on with the traditional civil commitment dating back to the mid 18th century and revived in 1766 by the brothers Paolo and Nicola de Simone, who, thanks to their cooperation with Domenico Terres, edited the works of Antonio Genovesi. This commitment was then continued by Gennaro and Vincenzo de Simone, up until the inauguration of the Republic.

During that same period, Francesco Mario Pagano, called back to Naples after his exile by the Republic’s ministry of internal affairs, embarked upon intense publicistic activity, in October publishing his *Discorso sulla relazione dell’agricoltura, delle arti e del commercio allo spirito pubblico (Speech on the relation between agriculture, arts and trade with public spirit)*, held a few weeks before at the Agriculture, Arts and Trade Society. It is worth remembering that the speech was also published by Vincenzo Poggioli, the republican editor from Rome who had also probably printed the text of the Roman constitution and who was, in those days, re-printing the *Scienza della legislazione (Legislation Science)* by Filangieri.⁷

As we know, the Neapolitan Republic ended in a blood bath, the majority of the protagonists being sentenced to death by hanging; Francesco Salvi managed to escape, hiding first in Marseille and then in Lyon. In June 1800 he went back to Milan with the Napoleonic

troops and was appointed as a logic and metaphysics teacher at the Brera gymnasium. Moreover, he was also appointed as an inspector of theatrical works and the president of the Patriotic Theatre Society. From 1803 he was employed in the Milan Royal Special Schools, where he taught history and diplomacy and then public and commercial law.⁸ Having decided to distance himself from the official political scenario, Salfi oriented his patriotic activity towards democratic partisanship and Carbonarism, although he had an important role in the new-born, pro-government Grande Oriente d'Italia.

It was during this period that he wrote and published the eulogy on Antonio Serra, which has been attributed with importance not only from the point of view of history of economics but also in political and cultural terms. We can better understand the interest that Salfi showed in Serra if we take into account the fact that in those years he was working on a re-edition of the *Scienza della legislazione* by Filangieri. Salfi was well aware of the new and astonishing success that the *Scienza della legislazione* had had after the Restoration – all the more striking if we take into account the fact that in 1812, during the preparatory activities for the new constitutions, the Cortes of Cadiz improved on the Spanish translation of the *Scienza*, thus producing the first complete text after the abridgements imposed by censorship thirty years before.

In 1814, when the Italian Kingdom fell, Salfi moved to Naples, and thanks to the help of Murat, one of his old sponsors at the time of the Cisalpine Republic, he obtained the teaching post for history and chronology at the University and Knighthood in the Royal Order of the Two Sicilies. He remained loyal to Murat up to the defeat of Tolentino, and then he took refuge in Paris at the beginning of summer 1815. During his exile, he continued with his patriotic activities and founded, together with some friends, the “Società dell’emancipazione nazionale” (“National emancipation society”) while also keeping on good terms with Filippo Buonarroti.

The relations between constitutionalism, economy, and Masonry emerged again a few years later in 1821, when the French editor Dufart re-published in Paris the *Scienza della legislazione*, introducing – in debate with Benjamin Constant – an important new element, namely the *Éloge de Filangieri*, written by Francesco Saverio Salfi and patterned on the same model as the eulogy on Serra.

In Salfi’s pages, the biographical elements of Filangieri’s life were transposed into the myth of the young jurist who died prematurely having

268 *Antonio Trampus*

anticipated the French Revolution and whose membership of Masonic Lodge was proudly vindicated:

It was there that, coming to a yet fuller knowledge of the rights of man, and at the same time contemplating the fate of the just and the innocent, he felt the need and determined from then on to serve no other cause but that of humanity.

But Salfi went even farther in this direction: to him Filangieri was the guardian of republicanism, the enemy of absolutism, the sponsor of the “governments the nation participates in”.⁹

He was also directly addressing an issue which could no longer be ignored, especially after the constitutional uprisings of the 1820s, namely Filangieri’s apparent silence about modern forms of constitutionalism. Salfi underlined the importance of the context in which the work had been written and the importance of the fact that “Filangieri’s silence on the constitution” was indeed no more than apparent because there were many references to the constitutional experiences of the American rebels. The conclusion was therefore clear.

It is hardly surprising that Filangieri did not trace out a political constitution in the vast plan of his work.

Evidently, he had taught a constitutional policy method without defining a type of constitutional document to change the global balance of his work, whose aim was mainly criticism of the old regime. Salfi adds that, for Filangieri,

it sufficed him to offer a glimpse of his principles and intentions; and his disciples, as well as his fellow citizens, made it quite clear for their part that not only had they inherited them, but also studied how to bring them ever closer to implementation.

For this reason,

One cannot follow his entire system without feeling throughout the need for a constitution to guarantee its implementation. This is the one great goal upon which the most enlightened Neapolitans have concentrated their attention and interest. Since the dire times of 1799 the plan and hope had grown to endow themselves with a constitution; and Filangieri’s greatest friend, of the ill-fated Mario Pagano, had taken it upon himself to present a project. This monument of

patriotic aspirations survived him and served to fuel his colleagues' motivations.¹⁰

In those years, Salfi also attended Madame Condorcet's salon, where he met F. Guizot, J.-C. Simonde de Sismondi and P.-L. Ginguené, whose *Histoire littéraire d'Italie* was continued after the author's death by Salfi himself. He contributed to the *Biographie Universelle* by Michaud; to the "Revue Encyclopédique", for which he wrote about 300 entries (1819–1829); and to the "Antologia" by G. P. Vieusseux.¹¹ Moreover, he edited the *Corrèspondance* of the abbot Ferdinando Galiani (1818). He died after a prolonged illness in September 1832 and was buried in the cemetery of Père Lachaise. In 2005 his body was transferred to the cemetery of Cosenza by the municipality and the local lodge named after *Francesco Saverio Salfi*.

3 The eulogy on Antonio Serra in the Masonic context

To better understand the cultural context in which Salfi wrote the eulogy on Serra, we must briefly consider the world of Masonry as it was at the time. At present we have no documents to help us ascertain the date and the occasion of Salfi's initiation in Masonry, although it might have occurred relatively early, probably during the period of his residence in Cosenza, as suggested by the fact that Calabria was one of the provinces of the Kingdom of Naples with the highest penetration of Masonry. Traditionally, we tend to consider his initiator as being the lawyer Domenico Bisceglia, who had a very important role during Salfi's youth and also during the years he spent in the seminary, on account of the clandestine texts of the Enlightenment that he managed to read thanks to Bisceglia's help. When Salfi moved to Naples in 1785, thanks to the *Saggio di fenomeni antropologici*, he was literally thrown into the midst of the city's intellectual world, and immediately proved to be one of the leading figures of Southern Enlightenment Hermetism. All the contacts he made in the city had Masonic origins and the sensational success of the *Saggio* was amplified through the inquisition-like process brought against him by the bishop of Cosenza and through the staunch defence that the Neapolitan court offered the priest against his superior.

In the essay *Saggio di fenomeni antropologici relativi al tremuoto*, we find the cyclic vision of the cosmos which was at the basis of the philosophy of history present in the *Saggi politici* (*Political essays*) by E. M. Pagano and which was a common element of the typical

“thought style” of late Neapolitan Enlightenment culture, diffused through the Masonic network. According to Salfi, faced with the “spectacle of the most extraordinary revolutions” of nature which “seems to live but to destroy itself” in a never-ending loop, the philosophical mind should have seen nothing more than an “ordinary phenomenon, similar to the cyclic setting of the sun”. His cultural references were the Stoa, with the “circular-infinite-progress”, Plato and the “sacred traditions of the Egyptian priests”, and the myth of the phoenix. Some of his dramatic works of this period are characterized by certain elements typical of Masonic theatre. For example, the tragedy *Corradino* (1790),¹² considers the origins of the foundation of the Neapolitan regalism (in 1789 also F.M. Pagano wrote one) and in II act tells of the generous competition between the two cousins Corradino and Federico, each ready to be immolated to save the other. This type of scene is very frequent in Masonic theatre through the mythic characters of Pylades and Orestes. Also, some aspects of the contemporary unpublished tragedy *Lo spettro di Tecmessa* (*Tecmessa's ghost*) could have connections with a symbolic path derived from the ceremony of the Scottish Rite, transplanted from Marseille to the Calabrian Lodges. The subject of the play is based on a parable of civilization coming to the cessation of all human sacrifices, an oracle pronounced by a snake and a final scene of a blind sacrifice in a dark cavern: these are all elements which could clearly refer back to the rites of the “revenge grades”, as they are called.

Salfi's Masonic experience changed greatly when the activities of the most radical part of the Neapolitan Masonic world gradually faded into Jacobin conspiratorial sectarianism. A large number of these clandestine patriotic meetings – generally held in a network of private houses – started to lose their Masonic characteristics in favour of real political conspiracy. Some of them were also held at Salfi's Neapolitan house and an increasing number of participants were attracted, including doctors and lawyers, university teachers and students, some priests, and some members of the high Neapolitan aristocracy. Some of the aristocrats included the Serra of Cassano, the Duke of Civitella, and Duke of Andria and Count of Ruvo Ettore Carafa, the lattermost of whom was then a martyr of the Bourbon reaction of 1799.

The year 1794, when the intrigue was discovered, saw the first imprisonments, (January–March) trials and convictions (October). Salfi had never aroused the suspicions of the Bourbon inquisitors, because in September 1792 he could still count on the favour of the Court for the many favours that he had offered.¹³

Up to mid 1794 Salfi continued writing librettos – under police control, like many city institutions; he was undoubtedly watched over, but not entirely compromised. Nevertheless, at the beginning of autumn, he decided to disappear while waiting to emigrate clandestinely. He was hidden for three months in the library of the house of a Masonic friend (the botanist Nicola Pacifico, a victim of the repression of 1799); he changed refuge now and then, up to his adventurous flight from Naples at the beginning of 1795. When Salfi published the eulogy on Serra, Italy was occupied by the revolutionary army, and Milan was under the Jacobin Triennium. He thus joined the “noisy, pugnacious and pushy” group of the southern exiles and refugees who were the spinal cord of the new democratic press, men who were not suffered gladly, sometimes even hated by the moderate conservative party under the French Directory. They were a small minority, but they were also the “most active and decided, politically engaged men and therefore the most dangerous ones amid the general apathy of public opinion”. There are no records of Salfi’s Masonic activities during the Jacobin Triennium, even though with the arrival of the Napoleonic troops in Italy, the temples could be reopened. Moreover, in many cases the officers of the revolutionary army themselves sometimes created lodges under the control of the Paris Great Orient, from which they spread the watchword of revolutionary propaganda, almost completely subject to French expansionistic policy and to the ambitious aims of the Directory and Bonaparte.

Probably the idea of the eulogy on Serra was conceived within the “Società dei Raggi”, in which Salfi took part together with a large number of Southern refugees in Milan during the period of the Cisalpine Republic. This society had para-Masonic characteristics much like the clubs that he used to frequent before 1792.¹⁴ We also have certain knowledge that Salfi founded a lodge in Milan, together with the exiles Vincenzo Cuoco, Francesco Lomonaco, Francesco Massa, and Giuseppe Abamonte; the name of the lodge is unknown, but we do know that it was abolished in 1802. The “Fondo Salfi” of the Biblioteca Nazionale di Napoli contains a letter from Francesco Saverio Salfi to Count Giuseppe Prina, minister of finance in the Cisalpine Republic, offering the eulogy on Antonio Serra: “I would not presume to submit to you the eulogy on Antonio Serra, the first writer on civil economy, which I composed, and which has already been printed and published if, being a name that touches on the honour of Italy, it could not interest persons like you who support and promote such honour”.¹⁵

After the creation of the Grande Oriente d’Italia (1805), Salfi became increasingly involved in Masonic activities, and he also had very

important roles within the Order: in 1811 he was grand master of the Milanese Lodge named after Viceroy Eugenio's mother, the *Reale Gioseffina (Royal Josephine)*. It is worth remembering that the philosopher Gian Domenico Romagnosi was also master of this lodge. From 1807 onwards Salfi is recorded with the 32nd degree of the Rito Scozzese Antico e Accettato (Accepted Ancient Scottish Rite) (as "Sublime Principe del Real Segreto" – "Sublime Prince of the Royal Secret", a degree he still held in 1811); as emissary of the Grande Oriente he probably organized and led the obsequies for A.-C. Saliceti in Rome. In any case, during the period of the Kingdom of Italy, Salfi worked as a teacher at Brera and as theatre censor, and he "only published works on the Masonry", apart from a few short essays and a few plays.¹⁶

In those years, Salfi produced a great many architectural designs (largely lost) and occasional Masonic verses, from the short poem *Iramo* (1807) to the *Tavole massoniche (Masonic Paltes)*, published in 1810). He also wrote a Masonic song to celebrate the birth of the king of Rome (1811), which was then set to music by Ferdinando Orlandi. As he had done in the Neapolitan years, he wrote a number of librettos and some prose related to the world of Masonry: 1801 is the date of the libretto of the opera *Clitennestra*,¹⁷ which was performed at the Scala during the Carnival season of that same year, with music by Nicola Zingarelli; 1805 is the year of the translation of the tragedy *I templari* by Raynouard, performed in Milan by the Bianchi theatre company and printed – again in Milan – the same year. Salfi also translated the *Carlo IX* by Chénier, which has remained unpublished. In 1809 Salfi also did his utmost to promote the new issue of the *Lira focese* by Jerocades; this idea was also sponsored by Romagnosi, who suggested the Grande Oriente could take upon itself the distribution of the volume. V. Lancetti was asked by the officials to check the doctrinaire compliance of the work. At the end of his research, Lancetti discouraged them from sponsoring the printing "because in some parts one could detect mysteries above the third degree" and because "moral freedom was too often confused with policy, and the democratic vehemence, which had already puzzled so many men, was too intense". Printing was carried out in 1809 with tacit agreement, with a brief composition appended, *La morte di Giacobbe, Epistola, all'amico F. Salfi, (Jacob's death, Epistle to the friend F. Salfi)*, some unrhymed verses "from the author to the friend, then young, on the occasion the composition of the *Saulle*, musical oratorio for the Naples Royal Theatre", in 1794.

His main Masonic work is the speech *Della utilità della F.: Massoneria sotto il rapporto filantropico e morale* (On the usefulness of F.:Masonry

from the moral and philanthropic point of view),¹⁸ which won a competition organized by Lodge Napoleone of Livorno in 1811. This short but intense speech is one of the major apologies for Masonry produced between the 18th and 19th centuries, probably the most important ever in the Napoleonic period, mainly because the theme of the relation between Masonry and the state is explicitly addressed. In this text, Salfi shows that he can gather the whole legacy that derives from the southern Enlightenment Masonry, with clear connections to Vico, Genovesi, Filangieri, and Pagano, but also to Masonic works by I. Bianchi and French Enlightenment culture (mainly Raynal and Condorcet).

He evaluates – from the Masonic point of view – the universal educational pursuit of the philosophes in the previous century, openly criticizing the habit of calling on public opinion, not always considered able to understand the truths of philosophy correctly. In this text, this habit is judged to be harmful if not positively disastrous. From an occultist and factional position, Salfi states that during the Enlightenment, “they had wanted to tear the veil of the sanctuary of philosophy, and philosophy had immediately been shown to be light, scorned, fossilised”. With this strategy of diffusion of truth, according to Salfi, the philosophes simply wasted their knowledge since they were not able to use the right degree of moderation and graduality of revelation which were the main and distinctive characteristics of Masonic proselytism. Indeed, with its gradual and selective revelations, Masonry aimed at “improvement of the moral and philanthropic nature of men”, choosing its initiates within a selected spiritual elite – that is to say, “the best, so that the effect, which cannot be expected from everybody, would be safer and faster” – all chosen among people of impeccable morality and faith and having all the civil rights since “the atheist, the wicked and the slave deserve not to be improved, but punished”. By following a cyclical regeneration model that is common to man and nature (as stated in the works of Pagano and in some early works by Salfi himself) through a series of initiation ceremonies, the initiate, by the “show of physical death”, would be prepared for the “moral death, which is the beginning of a much safer and better life” in accordance with paligenetic scheme which aimed at “the destruction the old man to build a new one”.¹⁹

As far as the ultimate aims of Masonry were concerned, even if “no other human institution but Masonry celebrated equality among men”, Salfi said that its main objective was to promote “sociability” through philanthropy, a secular principle as opposed to Christian piety, looking

primarily to the afterlife “instead of a corrected and improved society”. For this reason, “Christian charity was dissolved in a sort of spiritual bliss to be enjoyed in Heaven; the Masonic one to be enjoyed in the world”. To this Christian charity which is “closed to the common man for the sake of the Christians only, who do not tolerate any other sect” (*ibid.*, 46), Salfi opposed a Masonic philanthropy, which did not admit “any difference in nationality, language and faith”. In the period of the Napoleonic Caesarism, Salfi revived the traditional Masonic cosmopolitanism which underwent a crisis at the end of the 18th century and which considered “the same nature, the same man, the citizen of the world, under the different costumes and uses of mankind”, contrasting “the brotherhood feeling” with the “jealousy, mistrust, hostility and mutual hatred of the nations”.

The “Great Masonic union” was an effective and occult instrument for progress through the communication of knowledge, and for Salfi it had the effect of uniting – for the sake of all humanity – the best representatives of enemy peoples, even those divided by perpetual wars, so that “the secrets, the discoveries and every type of knowledge that the Englishman, as a patriot would deny or sell at a high price to foreigners, would not deny or sell them as a Mason to his brothers, no matter what country they might happen to be in nor state they might belong to”. For this reason this secret network of enlightened men (“union of the chosen strengths of the nations”) would create “the most rapid means of communication to widely spread the important results achieved and make them universal”. Salfi inserted all these considerations into a vast historical scheme that united all who had had an active role in the process for the improvement of society or simply, “had taught humanity to their families or tribes... after some great natural catastrophe”.

The connection with Boulanger’s catastrophism is very strong, as is the link with Pagano, who shared Salfi’s opinion on the fact that the Masons were acting “as guardians of the morality of humankind, which they inherited from their ancestors to transfer it – once improved – to posterity”.²⁰ This was a long theory of prophets and fathers of humanity that united Osiris to Prometheus and Orpheus, Zoroaster to Moses, Pythagoras and the Eleusinian Mysteries to the Essene and John the Apostle to the Rosicrucians and the “Nuova Atlantide by Verulamio”, Paracelsus and Agrippa to Boyle, to the Royal Society of London and then on to William Penn, Franklin, and Filangieri.

Surveying the new reality of the Napoleonic era, Salfi could clearly present the relations between this “union of the chosen strengths of

nations” and the state, and as Filangieri had done before him, he was able to propose the creation of a pact between the two. Of course, as I. Bianchi had already pointed out in his *Dell’istituto dei veri liberi muratori* (1786), the Masonry would need to give the state moral help in creating good citizens, “to promote the exercise of the duties and make” the people governed “progressively more docile to the laws of order”. Furthermore, according to Salfi, it has a much more specific function: “it helps the projects of the government, it eliminates the obstacles, [and] it enhances the hopes and prepares that same civil law material to receive the other changes it might be able to endure”. Therefore Salfi wished to see the creation of a gentle plot in which state authority and Masonic lodges would be united as “two hidden sources of light, whose sun, remaining invisible to the populace, could rend obscurity without damaging the eyes of those who are to benefit from it”. As an “example of the many services that the Masonry could offer”, Salfi considered the possibility of charging “the most intelligent Masons” with the task of accompanying the diffusion of every new law or decree produced by the state, “to underline its importance and promote its implementation”. Considering that “the State cannot choose the members of the society it has to govern”,²¹ the Masonry should become, according to Salfi, the core of a selective and programmed action on public opinion, aiming at creating strong consensus on the initiatives of a state which was greatly lacking in real political representation and was therefore acting only from above, along administrative channels. This proposal of intellectual cooperation was to be implemented in a subordinate condition; in fact, it is reminiscent of the experience that Salfi had in Naples: adhesion of the enlightened despots to reformism in a context in which a secret pact could also entail declared idealistic battle, free from any kind of strategies and ulterior motives, to be waged with an open call on public opinion.

Nevertheless, his activity is to some extent contradictory. It is difficult to understand how and why Salfi, while having important functions within the Grande Oriente d’Italia, continued to write plays full of anti-Napoleonic contentions; Salfi was “a Masonic big fish”, so powerful as to reduce to the most “mean, abject dedication” an aggressive man of letters like Vincenzo Monti, imposing “his authority on the guilty ‘brother’”, and yet so suspicious to the eyes of the authorities as to be jailed preventively on the eve of Napoleon’s coronation as the king of Italy. Salfi then gives contradictory judgements, one shortly after the other, on the Masonic world he had known for so long. First came a peremptory judgement on what it had “become since” the golden age

of Naples with Filangieri and Pagano: “a puerile exercise in insignificant formalities and, even worse, an instrument favoured by despots which it should above all abhor”; then, in another work of the previous year, total acquittal of the Italian Masonry of the Napoleonic Age, which, as he says, although apparently favoured by the government, had always retained a spirit of opposition”.

In the same text, Salfi also states that it was actually within the lodges that “day by day desire and hope were nourished for unification of the states at Italy, and a constitution fitting its needs and spirit. Quite unlike the others, the Masons of Italy took advantage of the favour apparently accorded to them by the government to give better circulation to the doctrines which then came to light with the effect that they seemed to cosset their protector”.²²

The autobiography of the Carbonaro from Trento Gioacchino Prati will help us to see what this contradiction meant. Prati was a student of the Milan Special Royal Schools, and in the period 1810–1811, Salfi and Romagnosi were among his teachers. He reports that the two were “the heads of a political secret society teaching the passionate young sons of Italy” to “shake off the yoke of the tyrants and transform Italy into a united and independent nation”. In other words, they were the brains of a patriotic conspiracy organized in the Masonic way, probably chosen for its flexibility as an “instrument to spread political doctrines all over the country”. The two divergent judgements that Salfi pronounced so shortly one after the other probably referred to two different spheres: the first to the official and governmental Masonry (in which he had an important role – aiming at exploitation of the networks), the second to the *arrière-loge* that he had created together with Romagnosi, tailoring it on their patriotic ideals: “a Masonry within the Masonry, unknown to many Grand Masters”.

4 From Salfi’s eulogy to the “Raccolta Custodi”

As we know, Salfi had obtained from Giuseppe Palmieri (1721–1793) – a leading light of Neapolitan Enlightenment – the copy of Serra’s *Breve trattato*, to which he would refer to compose his eulogy.²³ It is, however, clear in the light of the scenario that we have reconstructed that Salfi’s interest in Serra was not prompted solely by sheer – albeit erudite – curiosity or an appreciation of the “first writer on civil economy”.²⁴ The reasons that drove him to take an interest in the *Breve trattato* become comprehensible precisely in the context of a form of “cultural

consumption” and the interpretations that could be made of it between the 18th and 19th centuries in the light of a series of circumstances that came to coincide: the intellectual tradition of the Neapolitan Enlightenment, which, through Antonio Genovesi and Gaetano Filangieri, had stressed the connection between the need for good laws and political economy;²⁵ the need to revive and keep alive the lessons of the Enlightenment in the Jacobin age, when the traditions seemed to be crumbling under the tragic effects of the Revolution;²⁶ and – finally – the possibility to see in Serra – an author who was persecuted, imprisoned, and long forgotten – a precursor of the Neapolitan Revolution and the exiles dispersed throughout Europe.²⁷ In this sense, we can also understand the myth – to some extent invented by Salfi himself – of Antonio Serra as a Southern Italian follower of Giordano Bruno and Tommaso Campanella,²⁸ although in reality Salfi’s sole aim was to revitalize an idea of republicanism of practical utility in the new climate that was emerging in 19th-century Italy.²⁹

It was in fact Salfi who prompted Pietro Custodi (1771–1842) to republish the *Breve trattato* in the collection of classical writers on economics, and indeed Serra’s text was printed in the first volume (1803), immediately after publication of the eulogy.³⁰ Custodi himself explained in the introduction: “The copy I used for this reprint belonged to Bartolomeo Intieri; he gave it to the abbot Ferdinando Galiani, who treasured it as something practically unique; when Galiani died, it was bought by the Marquis Giuseppe Palmieri, who passed it on to the citizen Salfi, who kindly made it available to me”. Thus, the “Custodi Collection” consolidated the essential core that was running through the Neapolitan Enlightenment, from Bartolomeo Intieri (the patron who had contributed to the founding of Genovesi’s chair in civil economy) to the late 18th-century revolutionaries. Custodi, who started as an Illuminist to become a Jacobin, was one of the many Italian intellectuals who had changed their position with the Napoleonic regime, convinced that the revolutionary experience was over and that a new era of political realism and commitment was to begin, gradually working towards the cultural and civil formation of Italian society.³¹ At the same time, his project also completed the programme of the *Breve trattato* in modern Italian culture: in fact, just as the Masonry had abandoned its universalistic ideals to endow the budding ideals of the Risorgimento with vitality, so Serra’s work – in the general framework presented by Custodi³² – was transformed into one of the fundamental components constituting the ideal conception of history behind Italian identity.

Notes

1. Salfi, F.S., *Elogio di Antonio Serra primo scrittore di economia civile*, Milan: Nobile e Tosi, 1802. On this text, see also Addante, L., *Patriottismo e libertà. L'Elogio di Antonio Serra di Francesco Salfi*, Cosenza: Pellegrini, 2009 and, on Salfi's biography, see Tocchini, G., "Salfi, Francesco Saverio (1750–1832)", in Porset, C. And M.-C. Révauger (eds), *Le monde maçonnique des Lumières (Europe-Amérique et colonies). Dictionnaire prosopographique*, vol. 3, Paris: Honoré Champion, 2014, p. 2462–2471.
2. Ferrone, V., *I profeti dell'Illuminismo. Le metamorfosi della ragione nel tardo Settecento italiano*, Roma-Bari: Laterza, 20002, pp. 275–276, 345.
3. Giglio, R., "La poesia autobiografica di F.S. Salfi", in de Lisio, P.A. (ed.), *Francesco Saverio Salfi: un calabrese per l'Europa*, Naples: Società Editrice Napoletana, 1981.
4. Biblioteca Nazionale di Napoli, Fondo Salfi, ms. XX 65.1, "Lettere Familiari".
5. Renzi, A.M., *Vie politique et littéraire de F. Salfi, ancien Professeur dans les Universités de Bréra, de Milan, de Naples, etc. auteur-continueur de l'Histoire Littéraire d'Italie, par feu Ginguené, de l'Institut*, Paris: Fayolle, 1834, p. 134; Mafri, M., "Note alla biografia salfiana di A. M. Renzi", in *Francesco Saverio Salfi: un calabrese per l'Europa* (Atti del Convegno di Cosenza, 23–24 febbraio 1980), Naples: SEN, 1981, p. 85; Alfonzetti, B., *Teatro e tremuoto. Gli anni napoletani di Francesco Saverio Salfi, 1787–1794*, Milan: Franco Angeli, 1994, p. 184. The letters of Salfi di quegli anni sono conservate nella Biblioteca Nazionale di Napoli, Fondo Salfi, Lettere familiari, ms. XX 65.1.
6. Zaghi, C., *Il Direttorio francese e la Repubblica Cisalpina*, Rome: Istituto storico per l'età moderna e contemporanea, 1992, pp. 475, 495.
7. Trampus, A., "Un modèle pour le constitutionnalisme des Lumières : la culture napolitaine et les droits de l'homme", in *NUEVO MUNDO-MUNDOS NUEVOS*, vol. 7, 2007, pp. 1–11 ; Morelli, F. and A. Trampus (ed.), *Progetto di costituzione per la repubblica napoletana (1799)*, Venice: Edizioni della Laguna-Centro di Studi sull'illuminismo europeo, 2008.
8. Biblioteca Nazionale di Napoli, Fondo Salfi, Ms. XX 41.1, "Lezioni di diritto pubblico e commerciale delle Genti". The manuscript is not complete but includes *Lezione XXII. Del Commercio in generale* (cc. 110v.-112v.) addresses issues having to do with money, letters of exchange, intrinsic and extrinsic price of money, alteration and counterfeiting of coin, and the inequity of monopolies; *Lezione XXIII. Del Commercio in particolare* (cc. 113r.-116v.) deals with freedom of trade, fair trade, assets and liabilities, wealth of nations, the need to modify trade, home and foreign trade, the just value of money and the balance of trade; *Lezione XXIX. De' Trattati commerciali* (cc. 116v.-121) concerns commercial conventions, the differences between public and private conventions, the characteristics distinguishing contracts, agreements and treaties, the object of commercial treaties, their real and hypothetical need, and the invalidity of treaties contrary to the rights of a third party. These are important documents to form an idea of the intellectual context within which Salfi made his interpretation of Serra.
9. Trampus, A., Filangieri et Constant: constitutionnalisme des Lumières et constitutionnalisme libéral, "Annales Benjamin Constant" 30 (2006), pp. 51–70.

10. Salfi, F.S., "Éloge de Filangieri", in Filangieri, G. *Œuvres*, I, Paris: Dufart, 1822, pp. xx, cxxvii, xcii.
11. Galizia, N., *F. S. Salfi e la cultura europea. Inediti (1815–1832)*, Cosenza: Ed. Periferia, 1990; Froio R. (ed.), *Salfi tra Napoli e Parigi. Carteggio 1792–1832*, Naples: Macchiaroli, 1998.
12. Galizia, N. (ed.), *Il Corradino di Francesco Saverio Salfi*. S. l., s. n., 1987.
13. Salfi's original interest in Serra dates back to this period, according to the following autobiographical verses: "Despite the chains constraining me/
In the blind error author clearly present, again/I saw the light, and dared
demonstrate it/To the oppressed city of Naples, which all/Suffering the ills
of foreign yoke/Seek in vain the supreme causes/Of the extreme indigence
under which it groans./Of public wealth I discovered/The perennial sources,
and expounded the art,/To trade with foreign peoples,/Art, praise of which
was thereafter obliterated,/After a century and more, industrious Franco./
And what good came of it? It ended thus,/I mourned my neglected – nay,
damned – papers;/And in prison dead, I see none of my own/Who, from
the unjust oblivion that enfolds me/Might save the valid work and name of
Serra./Life I promise one, solace to the others/I tender", cfr. Giglio, *La poesia autobiografica*, cit., p. 120.
14. Sòriga, R., "La ristampa milanese della 'Lira Focese' di Antonio Jeròcades", in *"Rassegna Storica del Risorgimento"*, V (1918), p. 730; Nardi, C., *La vita e le opere di Francesco Saverio Salfi (1759–1832)*, Genoa: Libreria editrice moderna, 1925, p. 67; Zucco, A., 1799. *La Repubblica Napoletana e la massoneria*, Cosenza: Edizioni Brenner, 1999.
15. Biblioteca Nazionale di Napoli, Fondo Salfi, ms. XX 53.1 "Minuta di lettera di Salfi", c. 76. See, moreover, Froio (ed.), *Salfi tra Napoli e Parigi*, cit., pp. 119–120.
16. Luzio, A., "La Massoneria sotto il Regno Italico e la restaurazione austriaca", in *Archivio Storico Lombardo*, XLIV (1918), pp. 241–352; Della Peruta, E., "Francesco Saverio Salfi e un progetto di riforma della Massoneria italiana nei primi anni Restaurazione", in *Storia della massoneria. Studi e testi*, n. 2, Turin: s.d. [1983], pp. 63–73.
17. *Clitennestra, melodramma in tre atti del cittadino Franco Salfi. Da rappresentarsi nel Teatro alla Scala il carnevale dell'anno 1801 v.s. anno 9. repubblicano, la musica è del celebre maestro di cappella Nicola Zingarelli*, Milan: dalla Tipografia Pirola, 1801; Tocchini, G., "Dall'Antico Regime alla Cisalpina. Morale e politica nel teatro per musica di Francesco Saverio Salfi", in *Salfi librettista*, a cura di F. P. Russo, Vibo Valentia: Ed. Monteleone, 2001, pp. 75–76.
18. *Della utilità della Franca Massoneria sotto il rapporto filantropico e morale. Discorso di F. Salfi coronato dalla R.L. Napoleone all'O. di Livorno*. Florence: Dai tipi del Grand'Oriente d'Italia, 1811. New edition Cosenza: Edizioni Brenner, 1986.
19. Salfi, (1811), 1986, pp. 15–20; see moreover Tocchini, G., "Salfi Francesco Saverio", in Porset, C. And M.C. Révauger, *Le Monde maçonnique des Lumières (Europe-Amériques)*. *Dictionnaire prosopographique*, Paris: Honoré Champion, 2008 (in print).
20. Salfi, (1811), 1986, pp. 47–60.
21. Salfi (1811), 1986, pp. 71–75.

22. Salfi, F.S., *L'Italie au dix-neuvième siècle, ou de la nécessité d'accorder, en Italie, le pouvoir avec la liberté*, Paris: Dufart, 1821, p. 21.
23. De Rosa, L., "Antonio Serra e i suoi critici", in *Atti del III congresso storico calabrese*, Naples: F. Fiorentino, 1964, p. 117. On Palmieri also Ferrone, V., *La società giusta ed equa. Repubblicanesimo e diritti dell'uomo in Gaetano Filangieri*, Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2003, p. 193.
24. Thus evoked with Salfi's *Elogio di Antonio Serra*, 1802.
25. The bibliography on the subject has grown with a number of contributions over the last few years; for a general survey, see now Silvestrini, M.T., "Free trade, feudal remnants and international equilibrium in Gaetano Filangieri's Science of Legislation", in Stapelbroek, K. (ed.), *Commerce and morality in Eighteenth-Century Italy, "History of European Ideas"*, 32, 4 (2006), pp. 502–524.
26. Ferrone, V., "L'Illuminismo italiano e la Rivoluzione napoletana del 1799", in id., *I profeti dell'Illuminismo*, 2002.
27. Rao, A.M., *Esuli. L'emigrazione politica italiana in Francia (1792–1802)*, Naples: Guida editori, 1992.
28. Salfi (1811), 1986.
29. Little study has so far been dedicated to the topic, which would merit far more; for an initial approach, cfr. Di Napoli, M., "La "fortuna" di Tommaso Campanella in Mazzini e nei repubblicani dell'Ottocento", in *Bollettino della Domus Mazziniana*, 1985, 31, n. 2, pp. 199–216; Giovannozzi, D., *Liberò ma cattolico pensatore. Tommaso Campanella nei manuali italiani di storia della filosofia del XIX secolo*, Bruniana & Campanelliana, II, 1996, pp. 295–307.
30. Custodi, P. (ed.), *Scrittori classici italiani di economia politica*, Milan: Destefanis, 1803.
31. Criscuolo, V., *Il giacobino Pietro Custodi. Con un'appendice di documenti inediti*, Rome: Istituto storico italiano per l'età moderna e contemporanea, 1987, p. 345. Cfr. anche Capra, C., "Alle origini del moderatismo e del giacobinismo in Lombardia: Pietro Verri e Pietro Custodi", *Studi storici*, 4 (1989), pp. 825–872.
32. On the "Raccolta Custodi", see also Macchioro, A., "La Raccolta Custodi 'Scrittori classici italiani di economia' fra la statistica. e l'economia politica", in Rota, D. (ed.), *Pietro Custodi tra Rivoluzione e Restaurazione*, (Atti del primo convegno nazionale Milano-Lecco-Galbiate 2–3 ott. 1987), Lecco: Banca Popolare di Lecco, 1989; Augello, M.M. and M.E.L. Guidi, "Gli economisti e le iniziative enciclopediche nell'Italia liberale. Ricognizione e analisi storica", *Storia del pensiero economico*, 41, 2001, pp. 131–163.