



UNIVERSIDAD
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REVISTA DE ESTUDIOS HISTÓRICOS DE LA MASONERÍA

LATINOAMERICANA Y CARIBEÑA | ISSN 1659-4223



**“Masons in Italy: The Borderland Between Fanaticism and
Liberty”**

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Date received: April 25, 2013 - Day accepted: June 18, 2013

Keywords

History, Freemasonry, Italy, Fanaticism, Liberty

Palabras clave

Historia, Masonería, Italia, Fanatismo, Libertad

Abstract

This article presents a survey through the history of Freemasonry in the current Italian territory, from its eighteenth-century origins to present, and analyzes the influence that the fraternity had on the country’s historical events. The article especially demystifies the legends surrounding the relationship between Freemasonry and the history of Italy.

Resumen

En este trabajo, se ofrece una panorámica de la Historia de la masonería en el territorio hoy conocido por Italia desde sus inicios en el siglo XVIII a hoy día. Se analiza el nivel de influencia que tuvo dicha organización en los acontecimientos históricos en dicho territorio. Y sobre todo se rompe con los mitos y leyendas que han sido sembrados sobre la relación entre Historia de Italia y masonería.

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“Masons in Italy: The Borderland Between Fanaticism and Liberty”¹

Aldo Alessandro Mola

Beginnings: A time of far-reaching changes in Italy

Freemasonry was first introduced in Italy in 1730 by Englishmen residing in Florence, the capital of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, then under the rule of the last De Medici, the dissolute Giangastone (1730–38).

Many different theories have pointed to the previous existence of lodges in Naples or Rome, but no convincing documentation is available. What we know for sure is that Freemasonry arrived in Italy from abroad, and that for many decades Italian Freemasons were organized in small groups of just a few members. Such members were aristocrats, scholars, and rich and cultivated people. Most lodges even included Catholic priests.

The dissemination of Freemasonry in Italy took place in a time of far-reaching political, cultural, and religious changes. There is no evidence that Masons at that time were organized under one authority, or that they had been organized from abroad, particularly by English Masons—who were the only ones with a unitary organization, although this organization was still under a consolidation process.

After centuries of stability, Italy underwent important political changes. After the rule of the Spanish Habsburgs, which, since the sixteenth century had either directly or indirectly controlled almost the entire country, the Holy Roman Empire (Austrian Habsburgs) started to rule in Milan and southern Italy in 1713–14 (i.e. after the war of the Spanish succession, won by Philippe of Bourbon, the nephew of Louis XIV of France), while Sicily was assigned to Duke Victor Amadeus II of Savoy as king. In 1738, after the war of the Polish succession, Austria was replaced in the Kingdom of Naples and Sicily by the Spanish Bourbons, the same dynasty as in France. This change was balanced by the emperor of Austria—Francis I of Lorraine, the husband of Empress Maria Teresa of Austria—being named grand duke of Tuscany. The emperor consort had been initiated into Freemasonry, although it would be somewhat naïve to think that the empire itself or the government of its many and diverse territories were somehow influenced by Freemasonry.

The treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle (1748) put an end to the war that confirmed Maria Teresa as the Austrian empress, against the tradition which reserved such positions exclusively for males and regarded the emperor as sacred. This treaty confirmed the existing balance in Italy. The fall of states that had once been powerful was now obvious. Such was the case of the Republic of Venice and the Papal States, whereas Genoa and Lucca remained small and weak republics.

Secondly, there were changes in cultural life. The main cultural centers at the time were Naples (capital of an autonomous kingdom since 1734 under Charles III of Bourbon, the son of Philippe of Spain and his designated successor) and Milan, a Duchy assigned to

¹ I want to thank Ángel Alegre Marco for translating this paper and Laura Normand for revising it.

Austria, Naples, Milan, and Florence became centers of scientific research and dissemination of the Anglo-French-German Enlightenment, following the popular philosophical trends of many parts of Europe and the Americas, as Margaret Jacob has documented in her works *L'illuminismo radicale* (Bologna, 1983) and *Massoneria illuminata* (Turin, 1995). Other minor centers such as Parma (under the rule of Spanish Bourbons), Padova, Modena, and Cremona, as well as some port cities such as Livorno and Palermo, became places for cultural exchange, with a favorable atmosphere for the establishment of lodges.

Thirdly, in addition to political and cultural changes, religious changes took place. After the wars of religion ended—which did not affect Italy directly, because the only religious minorities, the Waldensians and Evangelicals, were tolerated under the rule of the Savoy—Christian countries were split, not only between East and West, but also between Catholics, Evangelicals, and Protestants. However, Jews were deprived of civil and political rights, apart from negligible concessions in the Habsburg Empire.

The Church of Rome drained the innovative impulse of the Catholic Reformation and condemned Jansenism (Clement XI) as it sought dialogue with Protestants (Benedict XIV, 1740–58), but it did so without any conviction and therefore with no success whatsoever.

In 1773 Pope Clement XIV dissolved the Society of Jesus, which, until that moment, had been very influential upon intellectual and political life, but was now in conflict with Catholic powers (namely the Bourbons and the House of Braganza in Portugal) and with the Enlightenment.

At the beginning, lodges were a means for Englishmen to penetrate Italy, as they feared the Mediterranean would become a lake under the control of the Bourbons who ruled from Spain to the Adriatic Sea. Britons tried to build a favorable opinion within cultivated circles, focusing mainly on antiques, art, and history research. Thereafter French Freemasonry started to spread in Italy, starting from the Kingdom of Sardinia (Chambery in Savoy, Turin, Casale Monferrato)—at the time the state with the most powerful army of the peninsula—to the Duchy of Parma (now under the Bourbons) and other territories.

The excommunication of Freemasonry by the Church of Rome

Given the fast expansion of Freemasonry—which, by design, avoided the Church's control—the Church had reasons for concern. Tuscany had just been assigned to the House of Habsburg, which, for understandable historic reasons, was more tolerant of Lutherans, Evangelicals, and Jews than the Bourbons. The presence of English Freemasons (Anglicans or Evangelicals) alarmed the pope, who felt threatened. The Freemasons' intentions were not clear. Nobody really knew what happened inside the lodges; many suspected that the lodges were centers for secret alliances of enemy forces, or even opponents to the pope's primacy.

Pope Clement XII used his strongest weapon in 1738: the excommunication of Freemasons, many of whom were not even Catholics, or at least were non-observant. In 1739 the secretary of state of the Holy See, Cardinal Ercole Firrao, added to such condemnation severe punishments, including the death penalty and the seizure of property. The Church was sure that Catholic sovereigns, starting with Italian kings, would follow the example and forbid

and persecute Freemasons. However, due to the sovereigns' indolence or opportunism—rather than tolerance—lodges kept growing slowly, except in the Papal States. Italian Freemasons remained in small but influential circles. That was evident in Naples, where the most famous Freemason was Raimondo Sangro di San Severo, a wealthy and cultivated prince of an independent spirit, who founded the first Italian Grand Lodge.

In 1751 (i.e. three years after the treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle, which gave way to fifty years of peace in Italy) Pope Benedict XIV, a very cultivated pontiff who was in contact with Voltaire and other members of the Enlightenment, solemnly confirmed excommunication.

The Church fully rejected Freemasonry, as it was regarded as a danger for the Triple Crown: the political stability and the theological primacy of the Chair of Saint Peter. The excommunication of Freemasonry has generally been considered as a sign of church intolerance, a rejection of dialogue and a refusal of brotherhood. However, the pope didn't have any reason at all to be tolerant and to settle a dialogue with what he regarded as a dangerous enemy. The Church was based on the doctrinal primacy of the successor of Peter: a prerogative which the First Vatican Council (1870) defined with the dogma of the pontiff's infallibility whenever he spoke about faith matters, or "*ex cathedra*." In its view, the Church couldn't behave otherwise. On the other hand, the leaders of any other Christian and Jewish denomination behaved the same way, except Muslim leaders.

This is why Freemasonry in Italy found itself living under a somewhat ambiguous situation, permanently threatened by fanatic persecution. As opposed to what had happened in other European countries, such as the United Kingdom, France, the Low Countries, the Baltic states, and of course the English colonies of New England, in Italy Freemasonry never had an openly official organization. The prince of Sangro himself disavowed his membership to Freemasonry and declared that the fraternity was ridiculous and irrelevant.

Freemasons were obliged to hide, therefore falling under even greater suspicion. The need to maintain secrecy in order to avoid persecutions, trials, and convictions led to serious consequences. Masonic thought could not circulate freely in books, rituals, catechisms, or through public contact with the "polis." As a result, such thought remained nearly unknown even for Freemasons themselves, and deprived Freemasonry of unity.

Freemasonry became opposed to the "Religions of the Book." It was just a bunch of symbols and oral messages, thus facilitating all kinds of manipulations and interpretations or even heresy. José Antonio Ferrer Benimeli argues that Freemasonry had "Christian" roots, but in a time where so many Christian denominations appeared, religiousness and spirituality were not enough to prevent condemnation and excommunication by the Church of Rome, as many other "sects" and "heresies" had suffered.

Each group or lodge construed Freemasonry according to the teachings of those who, little by little, were organizing and spreading such lodges. In this sense, the case of the diffusion of the Order of the Strict Observance in Italy—aiming to clarify the origins of Freemasonry—is significant.

The failure of the Convent of Wilhelmsbad (1780), which would have cleared for once whether or not Freemasonry came from the crusaders (as argued by Michel de Ramsay in 1737), and more specifically from Templers (as argued by the Strict Observance), also had

some influence in Italy, as many members remained disappointed. Such was the case of Joseph de Maistre, a Catholic himself. In his view, Freemasonry was just a bluff, as Frederic II of Prussia said, even though the “grand constitutions” of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite had been attributed to him.

Freemasonry and the Enlightenment

In the second half of the eighteenth century, Italy’s most influential cultural circles (such as those in Milan, Florence, and Naples) had Masons too, but it has not been proven whether lodges were the only or the main laboratory for reforms and the dissemination of the Enlightenment. That was the case in Milan, where the founders of the magazine *Il Caffè* were not Freemasons. Neither was Cesare Beccaria, the most famous Italian jurist, who proposed to ban torture in criminal proceedings and the abolition of death penalty. In Naples as well we find some enlightened Freemasons, but many among the most innovative jurists, doctors, scientists, and politicians were not Freemasons at all. Many reformers were indifferent or opposed to Freemasonry.

In fact, by the end of the eighteenth century Italian Freemasons were very diverse. In Piedmont there were some aristocrats and very conservative military as well as scientists, such as the doctor and philosopher Sebastiano Giraud, who at first was rather inclined toward mystery and alchemy and then showed a more “democratic” orientation. In Naples some Freemasons were loyal to the English model, which prohibits the inclusion of political and religious matters, whereas others thought of Freemasonry as being mainly a political school.

The most interesting leading figure of that time was abbot Antonio Jerocades, a priest from Calabria, who was convinced that lodges had to play a civil and political role. Jerocades was given special authority to renew Freemasonry in Southern Italy by the lodge mother in Marseille. He explained his thinking in poems published in his work *La Lira Focense* (The Phocian Lyre) in 1783, which remains the only Italian poetry work openly Masonic. The abbot had previously published *Paolo, o sia l’Umanità liberata* (Paolo, or the Freed Humanity) in 1783. *La Lira Focense* preceded his journey to Marseille, which he described in *Il codice delle leggi massoniche ad uso delle logge Focensi* (The Masonic code of laws for use by Focensi lodges) written in 1785 (transcription by G. Kloss, ms. II, C 2, Klossbibliothk, The Hague). This work marks the division between the two conceptions of Freemasonry in Italy; the speculative-operative, and the one that included initiation and the struggle for power, between political philosophy and revolution, between humanism and activism even at the price of human lives.

In the last decade of the eighteenth century, Freemasonry in Italy goes through a period of changes, a time for regeneration but also for confusion. Lodges lost contact with initial centers and start to design a new track of their own. Britain regarded enlightened Jacobin Freemasons with suspicion, fearing they could be an instrument in the hands of revolutionary France, which rejected the balance reached between the great powers after the Seven Years’ War and the first partition of Poland, and used democratic ideals as a means to its own power. But even the few Italian anglophile (or not Francophile) Masonic centers were

not legitimated by England, who preferred to use the enemies of Freemasons such as Ferdinand of Bourbon and the king of Sardinia.

On the other hand, during the time of the Terror and in the first hours of France's Directory government, Freemasons and Freemasonry in France were cast out of cultural and political life. Many of them were tortured. Most lodges were dissolved. Freemason Vittorio Alfieri condemned revolutionary egalitarianism. Count of Cagliostro was taken in triumph to Paris before 1789, made prisoner of Pope Pius VI, and prosecuted and imprisoned in San Leo where he was tortured to death. However during the final years the Terror did not come only from the Church. Reorganization of Freemasonry after 1789 came along under the flag of loyalty with the government. Foreign lodges didn't have a choice: they either followed the directions from Paris or had to vanish.

The Napoleonic times and the rise of political lodges

By the end of the eighteenth century Freemasonry in Italy enters into stagnation for a short period of time. Freemasonry was aristocratic (aristocratic by birth and by culture, somewhat influenced by the Church), military (based on the principles of honor and loyalty), always ready to appeal to the king's protection (or the queen's in the case of Maria Carolina of Habsburg, Queen of Naples, sister of Marie Antoinette of France, who was closely linked to Maria Luisa di Carignano, princess of Lamballe, a Freemason herself who was brutally murdered in Paris by the masses). Italian Freemasonry woke up from that sleep with the invasion-occupation by the army led by Napoleon Bonaparte (1796–1797). Such invasion didn't mean the immediate rebirth of lodges, but it set the conditions for the dissemination of a new political culture embodied by written constitutions and based on some principles such as the inclusion of shared rules, free competition, and the final vote, all of these being characteristic methods of "lodge works."

In a few years many constitutions were drafted, such as those of the republic of Bologna in 1796 (the first one to adopt the Italian three color flag; green, red, and white), the Cispadane (1797) and Cisalpine (1797 and 1798) constitutions, as well as the constitutions of the Ligurian People (1797), those of the Republic of Lucca (1799), Rome (1798), and Naples (1799)—Naples' being no doubt the most important and innovative of them all. The last of these were the constitution of the Ligurian Republic and the Italian Constitution, both enacted 1802.

The principles that inspired constitutionalism were taken from the American Revolution of 1776, the U.S. Constitution, the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen approved by the French National Assembly in 1789, as well as from the different constitutions that followed in France until the coup of 18 Brumaire, the establishment of the Consulate, and the movement towards a monocratic regime that was to end with the proclamation of the French Empire (December 2, 1804), confirmed by a plebiscite.

In Piedmont—which had been annexed to France in 1802—lodges that followed the Jacobin line or were suspected to have republican and anti-Napoleonic infiltrations were

closed down. They came back to life after a strict internal purge of expulsions and conversions, and operated as a connection between local and French leadership.

The conversion of the Italian Republic into the Kingdom of Italy (just a “province” of the French Empire) led to a restructuring of Italian Masonry. François Collaveri has written some important works on this topic. On March 16, 1805 the Supreme Council of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite was set up in Paris, *for* or *in* Italy, as a branch of the French Council and therefore the third Supreme Council in a chronologic order since the Rite itself was first created. On June 20, 1805, the Rite based the Grand Orient of Italy in Milan, the capital of the kingdom that included Lombardy, Veneto and Emilia-Romagna, with Eugenio of Beauharnais as grand master. He was only 24 years old and was Napoleon’s adopted son.

In Lombardy’s lodges such as the Royal Josephine, we observe the reality of Napoleonic Freemasonry. After the coronation of Napoleon as king of Italy (May 26, 1805) and the appointment of his adopted son Eugenio of Beauharnais as viceroy, important characters including Gian Domenico Romagnosi, Calepio, Francesco Saverio Salfi, and the entire staff of the Napoleonic regime were members of the Royal Josephine Lodge. Plainly, there was no room for double loyalties within the lodge.

During the successive years three groups of lodges were developed in Italy: those directly dependent on the Grand Orient of France, located in the territories annexed directly to the Empire (from the western land of Liguria and Piedmont to the former Papal States, where Pope Pius VII was removed as sovereign and sent into exile out of Rome); those which followed the Grand Orient of Italy, based in Milan since June 20, 1805 by the Supreme Council of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite for Italy, which was founded in Paris on March 16; and finally, the lodges dependent on the Grand Orient of Naples, with Giuseppe Bonaparte and Joaquin Murat (who became Napoleon’s brother-in-law and king of Naples between 1808 and 1815) as grand masters.

The French-Napoleonic regime not only allowed the multiplication of lodges as solid links of a chain that connected imperial France with the Empire’s officials based in the territories under French rule, it also encouraged them. It is unclear whether the emperor was himself an initiated member, as was Prince Cambacérès, chancellor of the Empire, as well as all the leaders of a regime based on an autocephalic political power, emancipated from ecclesiastic consecration since the coronation on December 2 in Notre Dame and in Milan, where the emperor crowned himself with the Iron Crown, symbol of Italy’s royalty.

In order to maintain domestic freedom, lodges had to abide by governmental provisions and praise the government in any official rites and publications. Such political dependence became even more obvious when Napoleon bestowed on his son, with Maria Luisa of Habsburg, the title of king of Rome: a decision of a great symbolic value because it downgraded the Eternal City from the capital of the Roman Catholic Church to just the Empire’s second city. First the Pyramid, then Saint Peter: Napoleon was the destination point of both the Egyptian myth that sparked off in the eighteenth century, which Mozart used in his works, and the new templarism, away from the Strict Observance and raised to the priesthood of modernity.

In such historical context Italian unification and independence was not the lodges' target at all. On the contrary, lodges supported the established Napoleonic power. Members of lodges used to speak about politics (they praised the Emperor and any government officials) and used to practice religious-like rites, with a naturalistic, pagan, even solar imprint. Masonic feasts coincided with those of the imperial calendar and with time became official, as if lodges were a state within the state or its core of thought and political project. All this makes even stranger the fact that Napoleon never mentioned Freemasonry in the letters or thoughts he dictated while he was exiled in St. Helena.

The position of Freemasonry in Italy during the first fifteen years of the nineteenth century is peculiar for another reason: lodges and Freemasons have a public presence throughout the country, Rome included, and neither the Pope (Pius VII) nor other Catholic clergymen acknowledged the excommunication and the condemnation against the Freemasons. Furthermore, in Italian Napoleonic States, works that condemned the French Revolution, the Terror, and Napoleon's Empire as a result of a Masonic complot didn't have any circulation. Among the most famous of those works we find the *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire du jacobinisme* by Augustin Barruel or *Il velo alzato per' curiosi* by abbot François Lefranc, none of them ever printed. Freemasonry remained away from any criticism and controversy. Nobody dared discuss its role as a cornerstone of the established political order after reconciliation with the Church was reached with the Concordat of 1801.

On the other hand, however, Freemasonry was strictly forbidden in Sardinia, Charles Emanuel IV of Savoy's last dominion (who some years later abdicated and joined the Society of Jesus). Under his successor to the throne, Victor Emanuel I of Savoy, the prohibition of Freemasonry—ordered by Victor Amadeus III as a political measure against the advance of French revolutionaries and their domestic allies (pro-Jacobins)—was still in force.

In the same way, Freemasonry was banned in Sicily, the last dominion of Ferdinand IV of Bourbon, who was supported by Lord William Bentinck.

The Sicilian Constitution of 1812 is different from the Spanish Constitution passed the same year by the Cortes of Cadiz, as the Sicilian text provides for a bicameral Parliament and acknowledges the power of the Peers, whereas the Spanish one sets a single-chamber system. However both constitutions acknowledge and admit just one religion, the Roman Catholic Church, and ban any other Christian denominations, as well as any other non-Christian religion, deism, or free thought, whereas agnosticism and atheism don't even deserve to be mentioned. In other words, Britain had a great political influence in the struggle against Napoleon, but didn't do the same to defend citizen's freedom, as the people remained subject to the Catholic monarchy both in Sardinia and Sicily.

Restoration, *Risorgimento*, and national unification

The Restoration of 1814–15 restored the regimes that had been overthrown by Napoleon, except for the republics of Genoa (assigned to the House of Savoy); Venice (back to Austria, to which it was given by the peace of Campoformio in 1797); and Lucca, assigned to Maria Luisa of Bourbon, whose duchy of Parma and Piacenza was given for life to Maria

Luisa of Habsburg, Napoleon's wife when the emperor himself was sent into exile to St. Helena.

Freemasonry was banned in every Italian state. Pope Pius VII confirmed excommunication of Freemasonry and any secret association, and so did his successors Leon XII, Pius VIII, and Gregory XVI. Nevertheless, monarchs were aware that many of their subjects had participated in lodges. The ban, however, had no retrospective effects. In view of the coming restoration of monarchs, Masonic organizations slumbered, taking some measures that are not always documented. The number of active Freemasons in Italy around the years 1813–14 can be estimated at no fewer than 20,000. During the Restoration none were arrested or convicted for practicing Freemasonry.

On the other hand, Freemasonry had always kept a significant role in Britain, the only country that had never surrendered to Napoleon, (save for the peace of Lunéville of 1801), and had fostered coalitions against him when Prussia, Russia (Treaty of Tilsit, 1807), and Austria had tried or signed alliances with the French Empire. Even in Louis XVIII and Charles X's France, Freemasonry was active, albeit in a lesser manner. Maurice de Talleyrand, the French foreign minister, as well as many marshals, admirals, and prefects all continued serving the State while Joseph Bonaparte remained grand master of the Grand Orient of France.

All those new bans, condemnations, and excommunications weren't intended to punish those who had been Freemasons (past as past and it wasn't now the time to blame on them) but rather to prevent lodges from becoming centers for new conspiracies. During the eighteenth century the pope had been the head of the anti-Masonic movement in continental Europe; with the Restoration, due to ideological and political reasons—not because of religious ones—the Austrian Empire became the new champion of the fight against Freemasonry.

Those politics were clear: for Vienna (Chancellor Clemens von Metternich), lodges were the meeting point to every single secret society that wanted to destroy the established order. Freemasonry was thus banned, as were any other sects (the Carbonary among others) and, in general, any liberal and constitutionalist movement which proclaimed that sovereignty resides in the nation (such was the case of the Spanish constitution, sworn by King Ferdinand VII, who then rejected it in 1814) and that citizens must take part in government by electing the parliament or at least one of its chambers. In order to prevent Freemasonry to develop its (supposed) role as a hidden center for conspiracy, it was deemed necessary to fight any form of liberalism, to ban or control any books, magazines, newspapers, cultural circles, and any kind of intellectual life (universities, schools) or religious life, as clergymen had been and could be conspirators. In order to achieve such measures, Vienna had to ask for the Catholic Church's support. But such an alliance between throne and altar reached success only in the Austrian Empire and, for some aspects, in Russia, Spain, Portugal and the Italian States. It was weak in France (where cultural life continued to enjoy freedom), and in Protestant and Lutheran countries.

Restoration was a political project—in a way it was an Enlightenment's project: it had to ensure stability and therefore peace for Europe based on a balance between the great

powers, Britain included. However, the Restoration had another face: the Holy Alliance, reactionary and oppressive, with significant and lasting effects upon Italian Freemasonry. Former Italian members had set their expectations on the return of Napoleon. Even those who once hated him for being a tyrant preferred him compared to the Austrian rule and clerical domination.

Many Freemasons, who felt forced to hide their own personal story in order to save their lives, started to seek a new model. Between the return of the emperor and the Holy Alliance a third way was open: Britain. That was the way chosen by Italian liberals and by a large part of Freemasons, members of the Carbonary, old enlightened men, and even many young people who grew up in Italian schools, universities, and military academies during the Napoleonic period. The horizons that had been suddenly closed by the Holy Alliance were open again.

That change was significant and determined the next century as far as Italian cultural, moral, and political life is concerned, thus conditioning the trajectory of Freemasonry in the country.

Among the few signs of life of Italian Freemasonry after Restoration there was the initiation of Federico Confalonieri in a Sussex (England) lodge where the king's brother himself was a member, the activism of Masonic centers in some ports (mainly in Livorno, Tuscany) and as a response the hard repression of any sign of liberalism. Austria, the pope, and Ferdinand of Bourbon in Naples arrested—perhaps even tortured—processed, and convicted to heavy punishments anybody who was suspected of liberal conspiracy. Despite repression, sects such as the *Carbonary*, *Adelfi*, and *Federati* spread all over, reaching hundreds of thousands of members, even commoners. In this context Freemasons were only a few, but they had an objective of their own and led the movement. Following the example of the 1820 Spanish Revolution, in July of that year liberals rose up in Naples and forced the king to promulgate the Constitution of Cadiz, which was then proposed by Piedmontese conspirators in the Kingdom of Sardinia in March 1821. In the meantime, Austria arrested Freemasons and the Carbonary in Milan (Pietro Maroncelli, Silvio Pellico, Gian Domenico Romagnosi, and others) as the pope confirmed once again the condemnation against Freemasons. With no foreign support, Italian liberals failed their attempt. The Constitution of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite was published in Naples in March 1821: a “message” for the coming years.

Everything remained the same until Charles X was removed from the French throne and replaced by Louis Philippe of Bourbon-Orléans (the “king bourgeois”) in July 1830, and the Kingdom of Belgium was founded. In Italy, liberals and Freemasons made some unsuccessful movements in the Duchy of Modena and in the Papal States (1831). Not long after, Giuseppe Mazzini (Genoa, 1805–Pisa, 1872), who belonged to the Carbonary but who was never initiated into any Masonic lodge, was arrested and sent to exile, and then founded the “Young Italy” movement in France.

Among the political objectives of this organization was a generational gap between the new patriots and those who had been initiated into secret societies in Napoleonic times or in the confusing atmosphere of the constitutional riots of 1820–21. This new organization (or

brotherhood) rejected membership to those who were over forty years old. However this organization had an arrangement similar to Freemasonry, starting with initiation rites, which included a pledge of allegiance for life, complete secrecy, and a series of “trials.” Its target always remained political: independence, unity, and republic for Italy. Furthermore, such target had a national scope even when Mazzini established “Young Europe,” which was designed as a brotherhood of oppressed people in a sort of union or expression of divine will (“God and the people”).

Mazzini always preached conspiracies (even in the form of violent actions) and insurrections, as he was convinced that the tiniest movement could unleash a widespread uprising. His religious messianism clashed with Freemasonry’s pragmatic universalism, which was based on the principle of gradualism and was reluctant to revolution. Since the beginning there was a gap between Mazzinianism and Freemasonry that with time could only become deeper and wider, as was the case of projects and methods with definitely different purposes. Mazzini created Young Europe with the aim to revive Young Italy and the *Alleanza Repubblicana Universale* (Universal Republican Alliance) when he realized that Italian republicans would never overthrow the national monarchy of the House of Savoy because it was seen as a guarantor of peace, and therefore accepted by the “Great Powers”—the most important states in Europe at the time—and fully backed by Masonic institutions.

Before 1848 there was not any effective Masonic network in Italy, and “patriots” lacked any kind of precise scheme. They wanted the unification of Italy but they weren’t clear on the way it should be achieved: by a sort of confederation, or federation, or union, or unification—too many ways were possible, but all different. Above all they lacked any national or international benchmark. In 1844 Massimo d’Azeglio openly proposed to go beyond any secret sect and take action by daylight in order to build a “national opinion.” Two years later Pope Pius IX (1846–78) became the symbol of the Italian national spirit. Neoguelphism reached a huge success. In just a few months thousands of books, pamphlets, and newspapers were published, openly tackling the issue of Italian unity, at least under some form of league of states which were to include the pope. The few Freemasons residing in Italy, who had been forced to be quiet and silent, remained nevertheless prudent because in the Papal States all discriminatory provisions (both religious and political) against non-Catholics were still in force.

Between 1831 and 1848 there wasn’t a single organized lodge in Italy. However, some Italians became Freemasons abroad. This was the case of Giuseppe Garibaldi (Nice, 1807–Caprera, 1882), who in 1844 entered a lodge in Montevideo under the jurisdiction of the Grand Orient of France. By that time the Grand Orient of France was in contact with the United Grand Lodge of England. Therefore, Garibaldi entered the worldwide regular Masonic circuit, as his links with American Freemasons showed.

Freemasonry reappeared in Italy in 1848–49, but this time in a marginal way, with no influence whatsoever over the political-diplomatic or military trajectory being initiated at a European level by revolutions, civil upheaval, liberal uprisings, or national revolts (from Bohemia to Hungary). The so called “Spring of Nations” took by surprise the best prepared

conspirators, from Mazzini to Garibaldi, who offered his sword to Pope Pius IX in 1847 as a symbol of his support.

Lodges didn't have time to get organized. In March 1849 the Kingdom of Sardinia was defeated by the Austrian Empire. In July the Republic of Rome, where some Freemasons also took action, was rebuffed by the French military foray commanded by President Louis Napoleon, the future Napoleon III. Then, the Republic of Venice fell. In the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies liberals and patriots were either jailed or sent to exile; in the best of cases they were forced to keep silent.

The only real advance during those two years was the drafting of the Albertine Statute, the statutes of the Kingdom of Sardinia proclaimed by King Charles-Albert on March 4, 1848. These rules outlined two fundamental principles: firstly, Catholic religion was the State's religion, though other denominations were also admitted; and secondly, citizens were equal before the law. Civil and political rights were recognized both to Waldensians (evangelicals) and Jews. That was the real turning point, because from that very moment both liberals and Freemasons could count on the King of Sardinia.

King Victor Emanuel II, who acceded to the throne after his father's abdication (defeated at the battle of Novara in March 1849) maintained the Statute, and therefore the election of the members of the Chamber and those of the provincial and town councils and the freedom of the press, as he gave political asylum to political exiles from other Italian territories.

However Freemasonry remained silent. Many Freemasons would rather flee to France or Britain or even the Americas. So did patriots, who later became Freemasons abroad, particularly in America, Britain, and France (such was the case of Luigi Pianciani). In this sense, the Golden Book of the Supreme Council of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite gives us a lot of valuable information.

Monarchy and its ministers, politicians (such as Massimo d'Azeglio, Camillo Cavour, Urbano Rattazzi), and military (such as Alfonso la Marmora) didn't like sects. They feared that the oath of allegiance pronounced for admittance in the lodge could result in irremediable contradiction with the oath of loyalty to the king. The models of French and English Freemasonry remained strange to the Kingdom of Sardinia.

After winning the war of April–July 1859 and the annexation of Lombardy by Piedmont, in October of the same year the first "Italian" lodge was established in Turin. Its name itself, *Ausonia* (Italy's ancient name), showed the plan: the achievement of national unity. Beginning in 1860 "offices" started to multiply and hundreds of new members were accepted, half of them in the lodges of the capital city (*Ausonia*, *Cavour*, *Dante Alighieri*, *Campidoglio*, *Osiride*—all of them programmatic names). It came out that at least two lodges were under the jurisdiction of the Grand Orient of France, in Genoa and Livorno. Another one in Ciavari was under the jurisdiction of the Grand Lodge of Peru.

But the political and military events that occurred in 1860 were much faster than the Freemasons: Tuscany and Emilia-Romagna joined the "constitutional king" Victor Emanuel; the Expedition of the Thousand landed in Sicily led by Garibaldi; Victor Emanuel II

conquered a significant part of the Papal States; plebiscites were held which set the basis for the proclamation of the Kingdom of Italy (March 14, 1861).

Freemasonry in the new Italy: Lights and shadows

Available documentation does not show that Freemasonry actually played a leading role in those rapid changes, which nonetheless seemed to be inspired by Masonic ideals such as independence, unity, order, fraternity of “the peoples of Italy” (which had been divided since the fall of the Roman Empire and subject to foreign powers for centuries), among Italians and with any other nation.

The testing ground for new Italian Freemasonry was precisely the national issue. It was necessary to define what the “Italian spirit” really meant and what role the new Italy had to play in the world.

The first Freemason who clearly tackled the issue was a Piedmontese Jew, David Levi, when he prepared the first Masonic constituent assembly held in Turin at the end of 1861, seven months after the establishment of the Kingdom. Levi linked the birth of Italy’s unity to the history of freedom of the peoples. It was about the poems by Alessandro Manzoni; the music by Giuseppe Verdi. Until then there was an Italian Grand Orient. The Turin Assembly founded Italian Freemasonry under the name of *Grande Oriente d’Italia*, which lacked any direct historic link and any diplomatic continuity with that Grand Orient established in Milan in 1805 under Napoleon. This new Grand Orient founded in January 1862 was that of a Kingdom of Italy that stretched from the Alps to Sicily. That of 1805 was just a chapel annexed to the Napoleonic system. The assembly elected Filippo Cordova as its grand master; he was a Sicilian, the right-hand man of Cavour, who prevailed over Giuseppe Garibaldi. The grand master had two objectives: to obtain acknowledgement from other countries’ Masonic organizations and to unify the various Masonic organizations that were being established in Italy. But both failed. The United Grand Lodge of England took note of the new organization but didn’t execute any fraternity covenant. Cavour (who was never trusted by London) had died on June 6, 1861 and there were too many revolutionaries in Italy. In addition, a Supreme Council of the Scottish Rite–Grand Orient of Italy was established in Palermo, and was soon recognized by the Supreme Council of the United States of America, therefore gaining worldwide legitimacy.

Between 1861 and 1885, Italian Freemasonry lived twenty-five years of constituent assemblies, conciliation efforts, and conflicts. Garibaldi was elected grand master in 1864, but two months later he resigned. In 1867 the lodge *Universo* was founded in Florence (the Kingdom’s capital since 1864) in an attempt to unite members of Parliament with the most influential men who should rule the country.

Italy was going through tough times. In order to face the State’s huge debt the government nationalized any property belonging to religious contemplative orders. In 1860 the pope started a series of excommunications; Victor Emanuel II, his cabinet’s ministers and anybody else who supported the king were deemed evil agents because they had deprived the pope from a large part of his States. While the king was unifying the country, Pius IX was

splitting it because he wouldn't give up temporal power. In 1864 the pope published the "Syllabus," where he condemned any political doctrine of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (namely socialism, democracy, liberalism) as well as any "secret society"—including Freemasonry (also called "the synagogue of Satan")—as severe sins.

Part of the clergy wished the Church's immediate conciliation with the Kingdom of Italy, which now was an undeniable reality. Among those clergymen were some Jesuits, such as Father Carlo Maria Curci and Carlo Passaglia. However those who supported excommunication prevailed. Italy was split in two, and such division was more evident after the occupation of Rome (September 20, 1870) and the city's annexation to the kingdom, which was approved by the Italian people by plebiscite.

Only in 1870–72 did Italian Freemasonry begin to develop a real agenda. Up to that very moment, Freemasonry had been supporting either conspiracy, or the Republic, or the crown, or the government, or the opposition. Freemasonry lacked a clear mission or doctrine to follow. Freemasons knew little about Freemasonry. This fact is documented in the libretto by Ludovico Frapolli, *Una voce* (One voice). He was deputy grand master and then grand master, a follower of Mazzini and Garibaldi, who committed suicide after being expelled from the Grand Orient. Frapolli wrote and rewrote the "program" that was to resume the essence of world and Italian Freemasonry several times—he even changed the title. This grand master was the first who didn't have a serious knowledge of Freemasonry, of its original constitutions (those of 1723 and 1738), and its rites, such as the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite. His own personal views prevailed over tradition.

Frapolli also contrived Masonic catechisms. A portion of his works remains unpublished. On the other hand his Masonic resume is very significant: he was initiated in December 1862 and immediately promoted to the third degree, then, a couple of days later he was promoted to the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite's supreme degree. He tried to create a sole consistory made up with the four Italian supreme councils (Turin, Florence, Naples, and Palermo). Naples' council was led by Domenico Angherà, an archpriest from Calabria. In the meantime Domenico Franchi (another priest, previously known as Cristoforo Bonavino), who for a time had been enthusiastic of the Masonic message, led the Italian symbolic Rite, a lot simpler than the French and Scottish rites.

During the first decades after the foundation of the Kingdom of Italy freemasonry struggled to get unity and steadiness, focusing on some tasks that were strange to Tradition. This is confirmed by the fact that no translation of Anderson's Constitutions was published, nor were the Ancient Duties, not even in a simplified form. For over sixty years of life (1864–1926) the Grand Orient's official publications dedicated just an article of three pages to Anderson's Constitutions².

In 1864 and then again in 1872 Garibaldi wrote his Masonic program. For him, Freemasonry was a philanthropic association committed to social reforms, an organization that was the "mother of democracy" and open to women. In order to confirm such a claim, he

² *Rivista della massoneria Italiana* XXX (1900): 20-22.

initiated his daughter, Teresita, and many other women. He even celebrated Masonic baptisms and weddings according to a ritual that thereafter became widespread and which in some way recalled Catholic ceremonies. In his last years he ordered his body to be burnt in the open air, but his wish wasn't accomplished as in his funeral a member of royalty was present and the crown wanted to avoid any conflict with the Catholic Church, which condemned cremation as an act of positivistic naturalism and contrary to Catholic faith. However the Homeric pyre referenced by Garibaldi was not really of a Masonic nature, because Freemasonry did not consider cremation as a major, bounding rule, because due to health and hygiene reasons it was impossible to execute in the cities of that time, which lacked proper sanitation. Some Freemasons proposed to build cremation chambers.

In the following thirty years (1865–95), unlike its position during Napoleonic times, Freemasonry became a State party. According to the statutes of the Kingdom of Italy, the State's religion was Roman Catholic, so Freemasonry was known but never acknowledged. The State never enacted any law about associations; therefore Freemasonry lived always under difficult conditions because it could be declared a secret society at any time. The real obstacle was not the Catholic Church, but legislation, and to say the truth, Freemasonry itself, as Italian Freemasons didn't like public recognition, which might mean being put under government's control.

In order to understand Italian Freemasonry, the First World War and the advent of Mussolini to power (October 31, 1922), we have many sources and documents available, although scarcely used until now. First of all we have the "*Bollettino Del Grande Oriente d'Italia*" (1864–69) and the "*Rivista della Massoneria italiana*" (1870–1904), then we have "*Rivista massonica*" (1905–26), which deserves profound analysis. Secondly, handwritten minutes of the Order's Council and the executive board of the Grand Orient of Italy. The records of the members of the Grand Orient since 1875 until the moment when the lodges were dissolved in 1925 show more than 60,000 names.

Finally there is a huge amount of documents regarding Freemasons kept in the State's archives (around one hundred), governmental bodies (provinces, city councils), or preserved by other institutions and individuals. Nevertheless most lodges' minutes are missing, except for a few cases such as those from *La Concordia* (Florence), *Rienzi* (Rome), and a few other lodges. In 1925 the Italian government strongly hindered Freemasonry's life, and that's why the grand masters of the two organizations active at the time, the Grand Orient and the Grand Lodge of Italy, decided to terminate the lodges.

It is understandable that many letters had been destroyed or hidden as a means to avoid persecution. However numerous lodges existed abroad—in European countries, in northern Africa and the Americas, as well as in the Kingdom's colonies—but we know little about their daily life and documentation, just as we know very little about the relationships between Italian Freemasons' leaders and major foreign obedience. A third of the Grand Orient's offices in 1924 were abroad, including the U.S., where booming lodges were found in Denver (Colorado), Cleveland, Chicago, Christopher and Herrin (Illinois), Boston (Massachusetts), Newark (New Jersey), Philadelphia, Pittsburgh and Uniontown (Pennsylvania)—up to a total of twelve offices.

The Grand Lodge of Italy also had many subsidiaries in the Americas, but available information about them is just starting to be analyzed, partially thanks to the work *Annales: Gran Loggia d'Italia degli A.L.A. M.: cronologia di storia della Massoneria italiana e internazionale (1908–2012)* by Luigi Pruneti (Rome, Atanor, 2013). In this sense the recovery of members' records (26,000 names between 1915 and 1925) and other unpublished documentation partially kept in the Rome office has been highly useful.

The annexation of Rome by the Kingdom of Italy (the Italian army entered the Eternal City on September 20, 1870 and a plebiscite followed on October 2) marked the Papal States' *debellatio* and also the condemnation of the State by the Church, which once again renewed excommunication against the king, his ministers, and his supporters. Pope Pius IX solemnly reaffirmed the excommunication of Freemasonry in hundreds of documents (encyclicals, apostolic constitutions, letters, speeches) where he charged it of conspiracy against the Church, the Catholic faith, religion, and any form of spirituality. His successor, Leon XIII (1878–1903), confirmed such excommunication in his encyclical *Humanum genus* in 1884, where he said that perhaps there were some people of good faith in Masonic groups, but Freemasonry itself was evil and therefore its members had to be excluded from the Church. The most reliable Catholic publications (such as the prestigious Jesuit magazine *La Civiltà cattolica*) led a continuous battle to bring Freemasonry into discredit, accusing it of practicing obscene and blasphemous rites. Such disapproval was extended even to those public bodies like the government or any local authorities that fostered, or at least didn't ban, the erection of monuments in honor of heretics. In Rome a monument was unveiled in 1889 in honor of Giordano Bruno, the philosopher who was burnt alive in Campo dei Fiori. Other monuments were erected to Arnaldo da Brescia, Galileo Galilei, Paolo Sarpi, or Fra Dolcino, all of them heretics or victims of religious prosecution.

Many enemies of the Church pretended to have its blessing because they were "believers" and more fanatic than many clergymen.

Many lodges identified themselves with the "rebellion" sang by "national poet" Giosue Carducci in the "*Inno a Satana*." However, the government and the institutions always stood aside of anticlerical statements and Freemasonry did not always agree officially with such a stance. Within Freemasonry there were different postures on this regard, as it can be seen on the occasion of the anticlerical Council called in Naples at the same time as the opening of the First Vatican Council (December 8, 1869) attended by many lodges, although the Grand Orient didn't participate.

Italian Freemasonry lacked an identity of its own: it borrowed and put together many leading figures of the *Risorgimento* and the Unified State, such as presidents of the Cabinet and ministers (namely those of justice and education) among whom there were numerous Freemasons: Agostino Depretis, Francesco Crispi, Giuseppe Zanardelli, Alessandro Fortis, Francesco De Sanctis, Michele Coppino, Ferdinando Martini, and Nunzio Nasi. But prime ministers, ministers, and members of Parliament don't make up any policy; they are not the State. A rumor was then disseminated that 300 out of 450 members of Parliament were Masons. This was not true. Those members of Parliament who were initiated into any lodge

were very few, and each one of them followed his own way on the route of constitutional monarchy.

Nevertheless, Freemasonry was entrusted with the task of “making the Italians,” i.e. to build the country’s civil awareness through compulsory and free school and the replacement of religious ceremonies with civil rituals (as the term *secular* was still strange at the time) almost always attached to the religious ones, as it has been documented by the funerals of relevant Freemasons celebrated according to the Catholic rite (Depretis, Crispi, Zanardelli...). In order to achieve such commitment, Freemasonry claimed to be a cornerstone at the beginning of the national unification process, whereas the Catholic Church had been the unification’s enemy. With Grand Masters Giuseppe Mazzoni, Giuseppe Petroni, and above all Adriano Lemmi, Freemasonry improved its reputation and obtained a better control over public life, thus becoming the “State’s party.”

After Frapolli established the lodge *Universo* (Florence 1867) as a means to provide for law reform, in 1877 Lemmi founded the lodge *Propaganda massonica*, for the most prestigious “brothers” who didn’t have time or didn’t want to get involved with an ordinary lodge and were released from common duties. Members of this lodge were college professors, military, politicians, and distinguished patriots.

Among its most prestigious members we find Aurelio Staffi, who had been one of the Roman triumvirs; and Giosue Carducci, an intellectual of the New Italy, *garibaldino* in heart and singer of the “Eternal regal feminine,” as he was aware that the New Italy had to be a monarchy instead of a federation.

Carducci took action together with Francesco Crispi, head of the government between 1887 and 1896—with Freemason Zanardelli as minister of justice, they abolished the death penalty and made local governments elective—and Adriano Lemmi. However, contrary to what is generally accepted, the *Propaganda massonica* lodge never had any powerful men among its members and never was a threat to public life.

While Lemmi was grand master (1885–96), he was in charge of the Grand Orient’s finance and codified the cornerstones of Italian Masonic thought: the State as the guarantor of freedom and progress for every citizen and the fight against the pope (who was seen as “a knife stuck in the heart of Italy”) with any available means. Just like Carducci and Crispi, Lemmi sought the consolidation of the monarchy, in turn honoring the memory of Garibaldi and Giuseppe Mazzini with monuments erected in Rome and in many other cities, often boasting evident Masonic symbols such as the square and compass.

Italy started to be a unified country, with many and serious problems, but determined to progress. Mason Luigi Pagliani was the creator of the first health regulations that enforced the renewing of every town sanitation scheme.

The Church continued confirming its condemnation against Freemasons. In the years 1885–96 Léo Taxil, Domenico Margiotta, and others joined the criticism against Freemasons, as did other individuals who discredited the Grand Orient of Italy, attempting to remove the head of the government (Crispi) and the champion of colonial expansion, which was harshly opposed by France. The condemnation of one year imprisonment for the grand master was

published again, and Lemmi was charged with a theft committed in Marseille: an ignominious accusation.

Instead of appealing to the courts, Lemmi searched acquittal from a Scottish Rite jury. Overwhelmed by controversy and internal disagreements, Lemmi resigned in 1896, replaced by Ernesto Nathan, an Italianized Jew from London. The decision increased the suspicion of clericals against the Jew-Masonic-socialist conspiracy, just as had happened in France with the “Dreyfus affair.” But Lemmi’s resignation wasn’t enough and in 1896 many lodges refused obedience to the grand master. Two years later the Grand Orient of Italy was born (with a radical and republican tendency) and was quickly recognized by the Grand Orient of France, which had instigated such secession.

In order to blame Freemasonry, the Church used the loathsome arguments claimed by Taxil and the anti-Masonic League, which celebrated its first and only congress in Trent (1896), after which Taxil declared having been just a joker: he had played both with Masonry and the clergy. However it wasn’t Freemasons that unmasked him but some clergymen, so the Church showed that it knew how to expose lies. According to the people’s imagination, Freemasonry was considered as it was described by the *Confessioni di un 33* by Taxil and the anti-Masonic polemics by democrats and radicals such as Felice Cavallotti, who said: “maybe not every Mason is a crook, but surely every crook is a Mason.” This was like a gravestone thrown over the very Order that had wanted to create national unity and civilize Italians. Such a gravestone was not written by a priest but by the leader of the “party of the honest,” who was somehow touched by Masonic initiation although maybe not entirely satisfactory.

From order to chaos

The reasons for division into different parties as well as ideological and religious conflicts (which according to Anderson’s Constitutions should remain away from the lodge’s works) existed within Freemasons as well. In this time though, as *Rivista della Massoneria Italiana* has pointed out, many people entered lodges with no ritual outfit, wearing uniforms when they were military. In the sessions they discussed candidates for the elections or for government offices and local affairs.

During the first decade of the twentieth century, under Grand Masters Nathan and Ettore Ferrari (1903–17, sovereign of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite until he died in 1929) every year between 300–400 to 2,500–3,000 new members entered the lodges. Apprentices brought their passion into lodges, but how many masters were there to teach them how to restrain that passion?

Between 1860 and the Great War (1915–18) most of the initiated took their own political ambitions (members of Parliament, government officials, members of political parties) to the temple, with revolutionary expertise and/or ambitions, often strange to the former obligations and to the order’s bylaws, which were constantly amended in order to make room for the now prevailing ideological motivations. Such was the case of Ettore Ferrari, who as a young man was involved with the Mans Rights Circle, or Luigi Pianciani who started by introducing socialist Antonio Labriola in Rome’s *Rienzi* lodge or Mario

Panizza, Giuseppe Mussi, Malachia De Cristoforis, Adolfo Engel, and many others. It was a radical temptation or trend, shared by the Italian symbolic rite and by the leaders of the Scottish Rite, the origin of stress, splits, and arrangements as well as of the final laceration of 1908–10.

New condemnations (socialists, nationalists, and liberals)

The new pope, Pius X (1903–14), did not publish any new excommunication against Freemasons. He had to face Catholics' "modernism" (i.e. the opening of the Church to the "modern world"). Such modernism was also suspected of being manipulated by Freemasons.

And new waves of controversial issues were touching Freemasonry. Since 1904 revolutionary socialists started to demand the expulsion of any Freemason from the party. In the congress held in Ancona in 1914 their demand was granted, after a proposal by Benito Mussolini. Nationalists denied that the Risorgimento and Italy's unification had any connection whatsoever with Freemasons because—they argued—in Italy Freemasonry had always been an organization that served only foreign powers. Even a noted-liberal philosopher such as Benedetto Croce defined Freemasonry as "excellent for merchants and elementary school teachers" and he stated that Freemasons' ideals (philanthropy, fraternity, freedom) were just a utopia, whereas history is war.

Freemasonry was consolidated in the new Italy due to two reasons: the opposition between the State and the Catholic Church, and the electoral system that was geared towards the "VIPs." That system collapsed in 1908–12 as the government, led by liberal Giovanni Giolitti, rejected the petition—presented by Freemasons, socialist and republicans—to ban religious education in elementary schools. It was the end of the conflict between the State and the Church, which could now coexist within their respective sphere of freedom.

Freemasonry split in two: the Grand Orient proceeded against members of parliament who supported Giolitti. Some members of the Supreme Council of the Scottish rite, headed by Protestant pastor Saverio Fera, chose to defend the representatives' liberty and the separation between lodges and politics, as well as the "religious freedom" that, according to Anderson's Constitution, meant not only freedom to not be a believer but also to be a believer. Fera rejected the anti-clericals' clericalism. In 1912 his Supreme Council was recognized by the World Convent of the Scottish Rite. In its turn, the Grand Orient defended "free thought." Members of some lodges swore against the monarchy, the army, and religion.

The second change in the general scenario was the right to vote for every literate male of age, and for those illiterate males who had served the army or were over thirty years old. The number of electors rose to 8,500,000. Freemasonry was not able to control the election machinery anymore and lost influence. In 1912–13 nationalists performed a survey that shocked Freemasons, as nearly all respondents—politicians, scientists, artists, prestigious teachers—gave a heavily negative opinion of Freemasonry. They saw it as a secret, ridiculous, and criminal organization, incompatible with the modern world.

From the Great War to Fascism

When the First World War broke out in Europe, the Grand Orient immediately supported Italian intervention against the Austrian Empire in order to complete Italy's political unification. This was the moment to retake control. The consequences were a disaster, as Parliament lost the country's leadership. After the war, the political scene was controlled by revolutionary socialists and supporters of the clergy, both enemies of *Risorgimento* and Freemasonry. After years of creeping civil war, on October 31, 1922 a government headed by Benito Mussolini was established; it was a government of national union, with many Freemason members, led by a former revolutionary socialist, a republican, head of the National Fascist Party.

Italy was plunged into confusion and so remained until the accession of the single-party regime (fascism) which, as its first important measure, banned civil servants from becoming members of any secret society. This was the "law against Freemasonry" (May–November 1925), applauded by almost all members of Parliament, including many liberals and "democrats."

By that time the number of Freemasons in Italy was around 60,000 (of which 40,000 belonged to the Grand Orient and 20,000 to the Grand Lodge). Under fascist pressure grand master Domizio Torrigiani dissolved the Grand Orient's lodges, and not much later the same measure was taken by the sovereign of the Grand Lodge, Raoul Palermi. Upon the end of the Great War the king officially thanked Freemasonry for its contribution to victory (the number of casualties reached 10 percent of its members). Seven years later Freemasonry collapsed and disappeared.

Few Masons were actually persecuted, sent to exile, or condemned to isolation ("police seclusion"). Most members entered into lethargy. Many Freemasons helped Mussolini's government from outstanding positions, such as Alberto Beneduce, the main planner of Italian economy; Balbino Giuliano, minister of national education; Edmondo Rossoni, a fascist and trade unionist; writer Curzio Malaparte; and many others. Telesio Interlandi, who later headed the magazine *Difesa della Razza*, was also a member. It was a confusing and contradictory time. Freemasons who were not openly against the government—the huge majority of members—were not annoyed. Also in that time some well-informed magazines were published and Julius Evola, Arturo Reghini's former colleague, became well established.

Fascism fought Freemasonry for three main reasons: firstly, Fascism wanted to be "the Nation" itself and therefore any organization such as Freemasonry (claiming to be the "Country's Mother and Guardian") was not acceptable. In a war of symbols, there is no room for two winners. Secondly, Mussolini knew that some Fascist leaders (Italo Balbo, Roberto Farinacci, Giacomo Acerbo, Alessandro Dudan) and many military (Luigi Capello, Admiral Paolo Thaon di Revel, Ugo Cavallero), diplomats, judges, and government officials were Freemasons themselves, and he didn't want to have "the snake at home." Finally, in order to gain the support of the Catholic Church—which was necessary to guarantee government

stability—he had to “set an example” by banning Freemasonry, or assume the role of defender of the State’s secular nature regarding education.

Despite the dissolution of lodges, after 1925 many Masons kept operating in silence and in exile, where they were backed by brothers from the U.S., such as Arturo di Pietro, Charles Fama, and Frank Gigliotti, all of them Protestants. Gigliotti played a leading role in the Masonic rebirth during the period 1943–60, as he helped foster relations between Italian and American brothers, subject to three conditions: the absolute rejection of socialism-communism, anticlericalism, and a nationalistic conception of history.

Italy had to go back to the Western World, but there were too many and too difficult of obstacles: the old excommunication by the Catholic Church (the Vatican was even suspicious of the Rotary and the Lions) and the prohibition of Masonic membership for almost every political party that was said to be antifascist but remained totalitarian (Communist party, socialist party, *Democrazia Cristiana*, and the Italian Social Movement as a reincarnation of the National Fascist Party).

Freemasonry in today’s Italy: Known by few and misunderstood by most

In June 1946 a highly controversial plebiscite determined the fall of the monarchy and the foundation of the Republic. When Freemasonry was born anew in 1944–45, it became mainly republican up to the point of forgetting that between 1861 and 1925 the monarchy had guaranteed freedom and progress. In 1924, when lodges started to be assaulted by Fascist activists, many Masons, in a sort of extreme solution, entered the Rotary, which was presided over by Victor Emmanuel III. However, such past times were erased from memory. Among the personalities of the *Risorgimento*, only Mazzini and Garibaldi were saved from oblivion. The distortion of the truth made many members believe that Freemasonry was in essence republican, even revolutionary, and that its mark of identity was the so-called “*trinomial*,” an invention of Lamartine who was not even a Freemason himself.

The Constitution of the Italian Republic (1948) is widely influenced by such Masonic principles as equality of citizens “before the law, with no distinction of sex, race, language, religion, political opinion, personal and social conditions” (art. 3). But Freemasonry still remained out of public life, in a sort of limbo, surrounded by suspicion.

However, the Grand Orient of Italy was strengthened with grand masters Giordano Gamberini (1960–69) and Lino Salvini (1970–78), who were praised by many American grand lodges and the United Grand Lodge of England (1972), and even came to terms with the Catholic Church. In 1974 the prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Cardinal Ferenc Seper, wrote to Cardinal Krol that Catholics might be allowed enter those lodges which did not plot against the Church.

In this new philosophical and cultural climate, the lodge *Propaganda massonica n. 2* (P2), headed by Licio Gelli, under the leadership of grand master Salvini, gathered members from all political forces, government officials (mainly military), businessmen, bankers, and journalists. Gelli also designed a world organization to support Freemasons.

Under Sovereign Giovanni Ghinazzi, the Grand Lodge of Italy gained strength by granting membership to women, following the example of Giuseppe Garibaldi, and starting relations with liberal Masons such as the Grand Orient of France.

In 1981 both P2, a component of the Grand Orient, and the Grand Lodge of Italy were the center of a cunning outrage which reached enormous proportions. Parliament ordered the dissolution of P2; it was considered a secret association, without any in-depth analysis. A parliamentary committee of enquiry ended with six different reports and a provisional trial. Ten years later, P2 was acquitted by the courts from the charges of military or political conspiracy. But negative prejudice remained, also because in 1994 the grand master of the Grand Orient resigned and founded a new organization, which was immediately recognized by the Grand Lodge of England.

Soon, the Grand Orient numbered around 20,000 members again, among them Grand Master Armando Corona and Gustavo Raffi. The Grand Lodge of Italy, which had been chaired by Grand Master Luigi Pruneti for six years, also gained strength with around 10,000 members. Pruneti has fostered historic research and the public presence of the Great Lodge.

In Italy, though, no legal provision provides protection for the name of Freemasonry, and therefore any group of citizens may call themselves Masons. As a result, nowadays there are almost 250 organizations that call themselves “Freemasonry,” which nobody can prevent. This Babel creates confusion and discredit and does not aid the awareness of the origins and the history of Freemasonry. In most book stores the very few volumes on Masonry are usually found alongside works on spiritualism, magic, occultism, new age, herbalism, and sexology. Many people think that female initiation in Freemasonry is something like the Wicca or other forms of naturalism.

On the other hand, political-ideological and religious anti-Freemasonry is highly widespread, not only among clericals and right or left wing extremists, but among populist and fanatical movements as well, who promise a world of equals under uniformity instead of freedom.

During the pontificates of Popes John XXIII, Paul VI, John Paul I, John Paul II, and Benedict XVI no document was published against Freemasons. Actually, none of them ever mentioned its name. Benedict XVI has regretted “relativism,” but as his predecessors, he also praised Freemasonry’s basic principles: the search for freedom and fraternity, goodwill, and rejection of any kind of totalitarianism and discrimination. However, Pope Francis I has denounced the danger of Mason lobbies, in the same way he condemned business lobbies and homosexual organizations.

In Italy Masonry is still condemned by clericals, communists, and those who say that history is the result of conspiracies organized by Jews, Masons, revolutionaries, and the high finance, all of them always under the direction of lodges.

Recently, the president of the Republic—Giorgio Napolitano, a former communist—and Prime Minister Mario Monti and his successor Enrico Letta, have been accused of being of aid to the international Masonic fraternity. The right wing leader Silvio Berlusconi has also often been described as a Freemason, because he was formerly a member of the P2.

Although these are just inventions, those who think that history is controlled by mysterious and invincible powers, or even by the devil (which has been so many times recalled by Pope Francis) believe them.

Today's financial, social, and cultural downfall generates insecurity and fear, and fosters the search for populist and totalitarian solutions.

This is the reason why Freemasonry in Italy remains in a difficult position.

It is exposed to criminal proceedings, is a victim of ancient prejudice, and prey for movements which need a scapegoat to "overcome the current crisis."

As a conclusion I would say that without Freemasonry, Italy would have never reached national unity or today's degree of freedom and political development. Without Freemasonry, Italy would regress many centuries. Therefore, Freemasonry is a civil heritage even for those who are not Masons. Maybe Freemasonry's situation in Italy will improve when it becomes better known, when thanks to historiography, people get to know its real identity.

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