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Patriotic pilgrimages during the Italian liberal period: sites and terminology

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ABSTRACT

The article aims to analyze the phenomenon of "laic pilgrimage": the trips that during the first fifty years of Italian unity, saw the places of memory as the protagonists of the Risorgimento. Specifically will be analyzed the trips to ossuaries, battlefields, monuments and tombs of the fathers of the Nation. The text try to create a map - on a national scale - of the places of pilgrimage divided according to the "users". To different destinations, in fact, correspond different types of pilgrimage, mirrors of Italian political situation of this period.

Keywords: Laic Pilgrimage, Risorgimento, Ossuaries, Battlefields

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1. Introduction

This paper aims to analyze the "laic pilgrimage phenomenon" which means all the tours and processions, either spontaneous or institutional, that have been dear to the memory and national identity since the unification of Italy. Although the number of "la pilgrims" has never risen to the one achieved by the well deeply rooted religious organizations, we can see that the involvement of patriots, the number of sponsoring associations, the "places of worship" and celebrations either official or unofficial, have made up a particularly relevant phenomenon.

The definition of "patriotic pilgrimage" was used by organizers and participants to define a journey, through all those sites where patriots died like the Fathers of the homeland's graves, ossuaries and tombs of martyrs; people were moved by sentiments of devotion to the nation. Then, in addition to this practice must be added the "pilgrimage for educational purposes" consisting of school trips promoted by several schools in the same places. It was, therefore, a kind of different touring, so far conceptually, from the traditional practices of tourism and so extraneous from the amusement offered by Italian resort holidays that were opening up to tourism bourgeois.

Those pilgrimages were featured by practices and symbolic rituals, the patriotic destinations are now forgotten but once - at least for the small groups who walked these pathways - were considered places of worship such as sanctuaries for believers. In this regard, the lexical element analysis may be useful to understand the feeling that inspired the visitors since the Sixties of the Nineteenth century. Although in the most famous dictionaries (either religious or not) of that time, alongside the word "pilgrimage", "pilgrim", "martyr", "holy" and "sanctuary" does not appear any sense of secular nature, it is obvious how this terminology had become of current use even for tours which were not religious ones.

Going further, in this metaphorical representation, these places take on a mystical value. In the interpretation of those who took part in these groups, the graves of patriots and fathers of the nation, no less than those holy sites for Christians, were considered "sacred", "venerable", "revered" and "immaculate" [Siciliani 1902: 3-4; Centenario Manin 1904: 416] as well as "sacred" were objects deposited in front of them [Pellegrinaggio Triestini 1908]. Similar argument included the fallen war's graves, symbolically depicted as "sanctuaries" or "blessed" sites; the same happened for battle's fields [Siciliani 1881: 1 and 48; Del Grande 1881: 17; Campi Battaglia 1902: 329]. In this context, a particular speech deserves Caprera where visitors had real "mystic experiences" [Gita Caprera 1863: 136].

A land that seemed bare, poor and limits of unhappy civilization but which was transformed as a result of an ideal "promised land", "sacred isle", "paradise" or even a sort of Arcadia "lit by the smile of God" [Gita Caprera 1862: 136; Romussi 1892: 6; Cagnoni 1875: 92; Bettini 1892: 13].

Such reactions if compared with the representation of its most illustrious citizen Garibaldi (the main protagonist of these pilgrimages tales) should not surprise. While he was still alive he was immortalized such as an "apostle" [Gita Caprera 1862: 136] or even more as a "seraphic St. Francis" because of his life as a hermit [Pellegrinaggio Operai 1861: 10; Romussi 1892: 31; Toliverova 1993: 35].

After his death he had the most important consecration, Garibaldi was even represented like a deity [Pellegrinaggio Caprera 1907] or a messiah who could light up lives of those who would follow him [Terzo Pellegrinaggio Caprera 1897: 5]. It is assumed that many of these pilgrim's journeys and marches to memorial sites of the Risorgimento were characterized by "pious", "pitiful" and "devout" feelings of participants [Del Grande 1881: 30; Emiliani 1882: 57; Siciliani 1881: introduction] more over they have been seen, in a traditional way, as "patriotic" tours [Trasatti 1906]. This kind of terminology let the speakers describe people who took part at these pilgrimages like a sort of "apostles of the homeland", men devoted to the state cult, pilgrims moved by a holy purpose [Abba 1909: 1; Ravenna a Garibaldi 1907: 1;

Del Grande 1881: 15]. During this time, a specific language appeared, in fact the post-Risorgimento rhetoric developed a tight symbolic network and myths in which only few prominent figures have been sanctified and linked to state cult [Banti 2000]. According to this, we have to take in account Giuseppe Mazzini's published writings, which were written during his exile as a sort of texts where he often used a religious terminology to explain his ideology and patriotic duties [Mazzini, 1848, 1860 and 1861]. This brief summary was necessary to argue and justify the word - "Pilgrimage" - used in this analysis to describe journeys and parades that means a very distant idea from its etymologic origin.

2. Sites

Before describing the main destinations and rituals implemented by participants, it is necessary to make a clarification. Not all the travel experiences to memorial sites during the Risorgimento were called with the word pilgrimage, and again not all of them were so important and devotional sites. Cyclically, there were most visited destinations as devotional places then others and some sites were just an occasional stops along much more famous pilgrimage destinations. In the same way, not either all the fathers of the homeland's graves or places close to them (such as private residences) were the main sites of patriotic pilgrimages. Finally, it is important to highlight that every memorial places were linked to a different kind of political sentiments. As an example, there were monarchical sites while other ones were favored by veterans who fought for the state and then some others chose by Garibaldi supporters and irredentists. Yet, what were the main destinations?

Starting the research from those sites dear to the monarchical pilgrims, there is no doubt that the Pantheon, the tomb of Vittorio Emanuele II and Umberto I, has represented the most devotional venue. Built during the Roman age, it was the main protagonist of the most impressive pilgrimage during the Liberal period ever. It is strongly recommend to the reader referring to texts that have argued about it [Tobia 1991: 100-159; Tobia 1993: 227-247; Fujisawa 2004: 65-81], let's now consider how on that occasion (January the 9th, the 15th, the 21st 1884) about 76,000 pilgrims gathered in Rome from many different Italian cities. It was a real "secular Jubilee" organized with a particular statute and a strict rules paper specifically created by a committee to commemorate the 25th Risorgimento anniversary. Some decades later, the monumental tomb of the king was again the main site of two others important pilgrimages respectively in July 1901 and January 1903 [See respectively for the first: 29 Gallotti 1902 and De Leonardis; for the second one: Regolamento Comitati 1902]. Only routes - as Tobia mentioned [1991: 155-156] - were different.

On the occasion of the 25th death anniversary of King Vittorio Emmanuele II, the Gentleman, the third pilgrimage to the Pantheon became the implicit opportunity to venerate the tomb of the first king' son, Umberto I, killed three years early. To mark the first death anniversary of Umberto I, on July the 29th 1901, there was another national pilgrimage and a second one during the First World War already started across Europe on July 1914. It was always in the same place where he was killed and buried.

As well as the Pantheon, there were others minor sites exclusively dear to monarchic pilgrims among which stood Superga's Basilica where it was possible to commemorate the sovereigns' graves of Sardinia Kingdom [cf. Alba Superga 1898 and Crispoldi 1909]. In most cases, processions to the royal tombs were promoted by ad hoc born associations that due to massive funding they managed to involve a large number of people. At the same time, we have found smaller groups per each single event whom took part in patriotic parades and journeys and again a larger number of memorial sites to visit, as for example war battlefields and ossuaries of the Risorgimento period. Since the '70s of the XIXth century, these tours tell us how veterans and patriotic groups elected San Martino and Solferino's ossuaries (close to Brescia and Garda Lake) as symbolic shrines for the Italian independence. None memorial

stone, obelisk and cemetery as war sites had been so important and visited by a large number of excursionists and organized pilgrimages too, until the Great War. In the early XXth century, war veterans associations as well as patriotic ones promoted this kind of tours, often during some war battles anniversaries. There were also others important destinations as devotional excursions. However, till late XIXth century, journeys and parades in Belfiore, Custoza, Curtatone and Montanara had only a local or regional importance [See, among others, Perfranceschi 1882].

These destinations have never had such impressive national ceremonies as happened, on the contrary, in Porta Pia during its 25th capture anniversary. Joint veterans companies, in partnership with pros Garibaldi associations, organized an important pilgrimage called "Firts Italian Roman Jubilee" in September the 20th, 1895. This ceremony's scheduled program had a large number of events (such as conferences, shooting competitions, awards and fireworks) and a particular itinerary which included many different symbolic places as that one linked to the "conquest" of Rome – Porta Pia – and others commemoration and memorial sites including the Pantheon.

In the early XXth century, there was a gradual disappearance of former combatants that changed the way to devise patriotic pilgrimages along the battlefields of the Risorgimento. New people, new rituals and several sites characterized scheduled excursions by cycling clubs and patriotic associations which were born in those years and were active in north Italy. Many of them (like Italian Touring Club, Italian Alpine Club and Dante Alighieri Club) often promoted, in addition to the more traditional tours across the most famous Italian cities, organized excursions that became a sort of aggregation and political campaign. People whom took part in these events were not war battles veterans but members of those associations. That marked a generational change. This new target audience was made up by the middle upper class with liberal, masonic and irredentist ideals. They tried to aggregate all their members around the sacred sites which were so important for the starting point of the state. Thanks to bicycle tours new destinations were discovered, such as Mortara, Melegnano, Palestro, Magenta and Belfiore which were so difficult to reach before. Compared to the patriotic pilgrimages these new tours were much more recurrent and were able to involve a great number of people. We have many association's magazines as proof of this new situation. Then after the 20th century, pilgrimages which were connected to Garibaldi had some changing.

Two different kinds of journey characterized Caprera, the most visited place.

Already in the early 60s, during the XIXth century, several books documented how many visits Garibaldi received from ex-servicemen, Italian admirers [Sacchi1860; Carletti, 1882; Guarnerio 1882; Tocalli 1882; Dossena 1887; Meazza 1888; Locatelli 1901] and foreigners too. It is surprising how this Island (so difficult to reach and without any tourist attractions) was frequently placed within particular historic, artistic and cultural tours along the Peninsula [General Garibaldi, 1860; Malena 1862, McTear 1865; McGrigor 1866]. The Caprera pilgrimage changed his "formula" a lot after Garibaldi died, in fact it became a tour group destination instead of an individual experience with the aim to meet him personally; this new kind of journey was organized by private associations to visit home and grave of the hero. At the turn of the XXth century, every five years (1887, 1892, 1897, 1902, 1907), the isle was protagonist of five national pilgrimages with a very heterogeneous public. Battles survivors, anti-monarchists, anti-clericals, irredentists, citizens from Trento, Trieste and Istria, cities excluded from the Italian kingdom, were just some of the pilgrims who came several times to Caprera. The Garibaldi death changed not only the pilgrimage habits to Caprera, but led to a new series of new destinations. The entire isle became a sort of sanctuary and again all the Garibaldi belongings and goods became relics. That patriotic journey has been seen as a

renewed "Way of the Cross" and the main sites were the road opposite his house and the tomb where he was buried close to his daughters. Two curious stories (both related with different reports on the second pilgrimage) tell us about how these ceremonies were so peculiar and how the public participation was so impressive. The first one is about how a large crowd was listening a prayer when the floor of the house fallen down [Bettini 1892: 11-12]. While the second one talk about the presence of street vendors and souvenir sellers along the road led to Garibaldi house, a phenomenon which was not appreciated by trippers.

In Sicily in 1910 a caravan was organized to celebrate Garibaldi by Italian Touring Club; it was a particular tour for two unusual elements: the detailed program and the fact that it was open to other alternative means of transport in addition to the traditional bicycle. The event was an unexpected success: 600 participants, among them 101 "survivors" whom caused many organizational problems in a land with a lack of adequate means of transport and not always able to host such a large number of trippers. A year earlier, again in Sicily an equally successful tour along the memorial Garibaldi sites produced an interesting touristic guide [Merenda 1910].

In this survey it should also important to mention patriotic excursions to memorial Italian sites but located abroad. Overcoming the "annoying" Austrian border [Brentari 1901; Passaggio Doganale 1902; Deposito Dognale 1902], meant to challenge the Austrian authorities – they certainly did not agree with these tours - and even more the Triple Alliance contents. That was the symbolic aim of several cycling groups who went to Bezzecca, Trento and Trieste [Gita Frederico Johnson 1901; Milan-Lecco 1903; Bezzecca 1903; Convegno 1905; Trasatti 1906; Tonezzer 2007]. They were driven by an irredentist sentiment. Cycling Clubs in North Italy and the Italian Touring Club organized the same excursion several times like for instance the one to the statue of Dante in Trento [Bagnaresi 2010] which have been interpreted by trippers as one of the most important symbolic monument outside Italy. The statue represented the irredentist town soul, the meeting point where to be photographed and, at the same time, the starting point to come back to Italy. If there were many patriotic pilgrimages across all the kingdom and irredentist places in which a lot of people took part in, there were also many others along the Peninsula chose by Italian people whom lived abroad. Many cyclists from Trento were welcomed from local councils, citizen's bands, and again acclaimed by local population [1903 in Mantua, Verona e Mantova 1903] during their bicycle tours along Italy; these journeys were kind of parades motivated by a clear politic ideal across symbolic cities of the Risorgimento such as Mantua, Verona [Bagnaresi 2010] and Ravenna, but not for visiting the Anita's shed but to leave a "votive offering" (nowadays still present) to Dante Alighieri's tomb. During the 10's of the XXth century, associations (or ad hoc born committees) already involved in promoting these events moved their attention from evocative places of historic memory to sites related to current politic. The devotional journey, in honor of the fathers of the homeland and its Fallen War veterans, seemed, therefore, to give way to pilgrimages in new Italian lands of Africa. Now, let's move on the reason why the executive committee of the First National Pilgrimage in Cyrenaica and Tripoli (1912) justified the use of a so significant word "pilgrimage", which was previously used only for patriotic journeys during the Risorgimento, to promote a caravan in Libya. Although the official aim was to declare a dutiful homage to the fallen veterans' graves during the colonial period, it remains suspect – not unfounded - that the real aim of this expedition was about creating a popular support for the new foreign policy decisions of the Kingdom. And not only. Yet, the main "ingredients" that we have found in the official manifesto, which promoted tours to the new lands of the Kingdom, are a sort of ideal continuation of the Italian Risorgimento, educational purpose and then a warning for the future generations

[Pellegrinaggio Cirenaica 1912]. In the same year, between April and May 1914, Italian Touring Club also organized a tour which involved 430 people [Carovana Tripolitania 1914].

It seems clear how the new choices in foreign policy and the First World War have decreed the end of patriotic pilgrimage so far here synthesized. New sites, new martyrs, new rituals will characterize devotional tours during the Fascist period: elements which deleted the previous history and with it all its destinations.

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