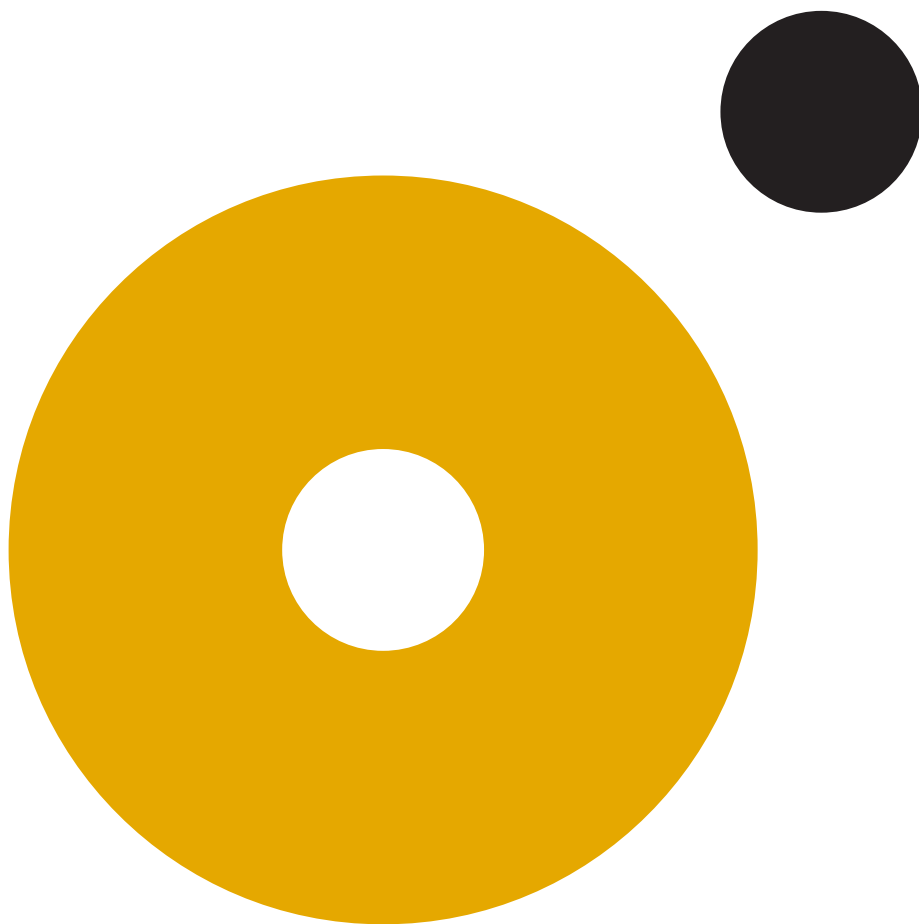


MEMORIA **SCOLASTICA**



The School and Its Many Pasts

edited by Juri Meda, Lucia Paciaroni and Roberto Sani



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62100 Macerata (Italy)

info.ceum@unimc.it

<http://eum.unimc.it>

“Educational Italianness”. National Stereotypes and Pedagogical Localism in the Centenary Celebrations of Italian and Foreign Educationalists between the 19th and 20th Centuries

Juri Meda
University of Macerata (Italy)

Introduction

In 1885 in his *La scuola pedagogica nazionale*¹ Antonino Parato – basing himself on the «moral and civil primacy of the Italians» theorised more than forty years earlier by Vincenzo Gioberti² – defended the centuries-old Italian educational tradition, in polemic with the proponents of the positivist pedagogy, whose works were very often based on the educational theories elaborated by foreign thinkers.

In the essays collected in the first part of the volume and consisting of a series of biographies of well-known Italian educationalist, Parato endeavoured to demonstrate how since ancient times Italian culture had created its own original educational tradition, which – as Giorgio Chiosso has already noted – would have been «fine-tuned in its main principles as early as the humanistic culture of the 15th century, [...] gradually developed in a popular sense through the contributions of personalities such as Borromeo, Calasanzio and Miani [and] finally matured in the 19th century with the reflections and indications of Rosmini, [...] Aporti, Lambruschini, Capponi, Gioberti and Tommaseo»³.

Parato was a leading exponent of that Catholic spiritualism that was convinced that it was precisely in the continuity between Classical culture and Christian culture initially conceived by Francesco Petrarca and later shared by other thinkers of the early Italian Humanism that underlay the cultural substratum in which this tradition had been shaped. This in opposition to modern German educational theories, which arising from welding

¹ A. Parato, *La scuola pedagogica nazionale*, Torino, Botta, 1885.

² V. Gioberti, *Del primato morale e civile degli italiani*, Brusselle, dalle stampe di Meline, Cans e Compagnia, 1843.

³ G. Chiosso, *Profilo storico della pedagogia cristiana in Italia: XIX e XX secolo*, Brescia, La Scuola, 2001, p. 63.

between late German Humanism – aimed at a profound renewal of the Church through the recovery of the Christian doctrine of the origins – and the Protestant Reformation.

In those years, Catholic spiritualism was engaged in a heated controversy with the flourishing positivist pedagogy, bearer of the instances of German scientific pedagogy, to which it contrasted – as Roberto Sani already noted in 2001 – «a pedagogical perspective firmly anchored to Christian principles and in line with the addresses of the national educational tradition»⁴.

From a spiritualist perspective, therefore, we can state that the rediscovery of this glorious tradition appeared more functional to the defence of the theoretical framework of the pedagogical thought it bore, rather than consequent to the need to generate a deeper historical knowledge of the educational past of the country, which nevertheless drew a strong impulse from it.

The clash between the spiritualist and positivist educational matrix can also be found within the public celebrations of the centenaries of the birth and death of some great Italian and foreign educationalists, which were promoted in the last two decades of the 19th century and which undoubtedly constituted yet another opportunity to affirm the concept of “educational Italianness”.

In that context, in fact, newly-born Italy – in search of illustrious antecedents and its own cultural traditions – undertook to define the uncertain boundaries of its national identity also in the field of education. So what were the characteristics of such “educational Italianness”? Using speeches pronounced during official celebrations, texts of celebratory epigraphs, commemorative pamphlets and other unpublished sources, we will attempt to dissect this concept, highlighting how it was not always substantiated by scientific evidences but rather by cultural stereotypes and nationalistic metaphors, which had a strong hold on public opinion and filtered very quickly into the common sense.

1. *The Centenary Celebrations of Ferrante Aporti and Friedrich Fröbel: Memory between Chauvinist Tensions and Local Skirmishes*

In 1882, the *Comitato centrale italiano per le onoranze a Friedrich Fröbel* (Italian Central Committee for the Honouring of Friedrich Fröbel) was established on the occasion of the centenary of his birth, chaired by Gabriele Luigi Pecile, who coordinated the numerous initiatives promoted almost everywhere on a national level to commemorate the German pedagogist and founder of the *Kindergarten*⁵, in preparation for the international celebrations in Dresden on 21 April of the same year. The Committee soon found itself defending the Froebelian approach against the accusation that it was «contrary to

⁴ R. Sani, *I periodici scolastici dell'intransigentismo cattolico (1879-1904)*, in L. Pazzaglia, R. Sani (edd.), *Scuola e società nell'Italia unita: dalla Legge Casati al Centro-sinistra*, Brescia, Editrice La Scuola, 2001, pp. 127-169 (in particular, p. 151).

⁵ Cf. A.P. Gualdi Piolti, *Nel centenario di Federico Froebel*, Bologna, Società tipografica Azzoguidi, 1882; M. Gonzenbach, *Pel Centenario di Froebel*, Palermo, Tipografia dello Statuto, 1882.

religious sentiment»⁶ and not suitable for «Italian childhood». The latter prejudice is clearly exposed in the speech given by the lawyer Enrico Sandoni on the occasion of the centenary celebrations of the Modena Kindergarden, in which the speaker relates how some claim that «Fröbel's ideas, yes, they are beautiful, they are rosy but, it is said, they are better suited to the children of blond Germany», because: «There you will easily see patient children, devoting whole hours to folding and weaving, thoughtful and attentive about plants and flowers. But our child has a livelier temperament, the midday sun warms him, his feelings are warmer, his intelligence is earlier...»⁷.

Sandoni then wondered whether indeed – given that the climatic conditions in the countries where that educational method was applied were different – someone felt entitled to question its validity in general⁸. He observed: «Fröbel's glory will not be diminished when the great work he began in Germany is treasured in order to shape it according to the needs of the Italian children»⁹.

While defending Froebelian approach, however, Sandoni emphasised that he had called the German educationalist a «powerful proponent» of modern educational reform, as «the truth and effectiveness of the system that took name from him had already been

⁶ See in this regard the speech given by Gabriele Luigi Pecile in the Senate session of 17 December 1887 («Atti Parlamentari»). See also «I Problemi della Pedagogia», n. 16, 1970, p. 993.

⁷ The same motivation, which evidently had to have a certain circulation at the time, is also found in another article: «If one then wanted to say that Aporti's system is national, because it does not force children to do methodical work like Fröbel's one, which therefore seems more suited to the patient German genius, then one would have to know whether Italianness means a lack of scientific method and critical thinking» («La Nuova Scuola Italiana», 1927, p. 636). Similarly, during a speech in the Rome City Council, councilor Francesco Vitelleschi had stated in this regard: «Every people has its own special genius, which is differently developed in educational methods. The Northern peoples of who have slow though solid and effective development are disposed to seriousness that tends to rigidity, while the Southern ones are as warm as they are early in development. Hence the difference in educational methods. While the Germans replace the slowness of their children's development with a method that involves the frequent repetition of the same concept and temper its rigidity with the habit of various games, in the Italians – on the other hand – the frequent repetition of an idea is unnecessary considering their precocity and the levity of character would almost be encouraged by the variety of childish games» (*Atti del Consiglio Comunale di Roma dell'anno 1886*, Roma, Tipografia Cecchini, 1886, p. 397).

⁸ Actually, fortunately, the differences between Aporti's and Froebel's kindergardens were also identified through more solid arguments, such as Aporti's lack of awareness of the child's spontaneity, while Froebel considered «the free activity of the child as a natural means of its development» and that according to which Aporti had promoted his kindergardens moved to pity at seeing the children of the working classes abandoned and exposed to vice, while Froebel had been «moved to compassion for the way in which young minds were oppressed» (F. Cicchitti-Suriani, *La scienza dell'educazione nelle scuole e nelle riviste italiane*, «Rivista italiana di filosofia», vol. VI, n. 2, luglio-agosto 1891, pp. 3-51; in particular, p. 13). A definition of what is historically meant by «Italian educational method» was recently provided by Fulvio De Giorgi (F. De Giorgi, *I cattolici e l'infanzia a scuola. Il "metodo italiano"*, «Rivista di storia del cristianesimo», vol. IX, n. 1, 2012, pp. 71-88; Id., *Il metodo italiano nell'educazione contemporanea: Rosmini, Bosco, Montessori, Milani*, Brescia, Scholé, 2023), who indicated its main features in the emancipatory tension of the educational commitment – according to a dialectic of freedom/liberation, in reference to the human dignity offended in many contexts – and the attention to the person, integrally considered in all its dimensions (including the religious one), whose full potential needs to be developed, also by stimulating his free creativity.

⁹ *Federico Fröbel e l'educazione dei fanciulli: discorso dell'avv. Enrico Sandoni*, Zanichelli, Bologna, 1883, pp. 23-24.

glimpsed as far back as 1400 by an Italian, by that Vittorino da Feltre whom Italy called: THE school master, [...] of whom prof. Contrucci¹⁰ wrote: SOLEMN EDUCATOR / FOR WISE ORDERS / THAT THEN THE FOREIGNERS / USURPED WITH OUR OTHER PRIDES / AND THAT ITALY FORGOT¹¹. And this I remember, not in order to diminish the value of Fröbel's work, but because I believe it is the duty of every good Italian to always claim the glories of his homeland, very lightly and too often forgotten»¹².

If it was «the duty of every good Italian to always claim the glories of his homeland», in 1891 the Committee for the 1st centenary of Ferrante Aporti's birth was set up and based in Mantua. Scipione Furga Gornini, director of the kindergarden of San Martino dell'Argine, was appointed president. He was supported by the honorary president Giuseppe Sacchi, president of the kindergardens of Milan. It is interesting to emphasise the «Mantuanity» of this initiative, to which we will return, as evidenced by the letter sent in June of the same year by the Mayor of Mantua to the Aportian Committee, in which he announced his willingness to contribute 50 liras to the honours and added that he counted that «the commemoration that will take place in San Martino dell'Argine will be worthy of the Man that the Province of Mantua is proud to count among its most important citizens»¹³. On 15 November 1891 – in fact – the Committee organised a ceremony in San Martino dell'Argine during which there was to be «the inauguration of the commemorative plaque placed by the honourable Municipality of San Martino dell'Argine on the house where Ferrante Aporti was born», followed by a commemorative speech by Francesco Saverio De Dominicis – a leading exponent of Italian positivist pedagogy – from the University of Pavia and finally the award ceremony for the teaching competition for kindergardens of the province of Mantua.

The polemics between supporters of Fröbel and Aporti – fostered by the celebrations – flared up again, somehow turning into – according to Angiolo Gambaro – a «struggle between those [the Aportians] who do not want to break away from traditions and deny the national spirit and those [the Fröbelians] who want to modernise and take the good wherever it is, considering it superior and indifferent to any distinction of nation and race»¹⁴. This in a context in which by now – as Fulvio De Giorgi noted – «the real frontier for a complete victory of Frobelism lay in the conquest of the *asili di carità* (charity kindergardens) and free kindergardens for the children of the lower classes, which were part of the public charitable institutions, stronghold of Aportism because of the lower

¹⁰ He is the well-known Tuscan epigrapher Pietro Contrucci.

¹¹ The full text of the epigraph is reproduced in: *Opere edite e inedite del prof. Pietro Contrucci*, Pistoia, Tipografia Cino, 1841, p. 86 (Epigraph n° XIV). Before the part of the epigraph reproduced here, it is written: «INGEGNO E SALDO VOLERE / DEL POVERO TUGURIO / CONDUSSERO AL SOMMO DELLA SAPIENZA / VITTORINO DA FELTRE / PRIMO IN EUROPA» (Ingenuity and firm will / of the poor hovel / led to the summit of wisdom / Vittorino da Feltre / first in Europe).

¹² *Federico Fröbel e l'educazione dei fanciulli: discorso dell'avv. Enrico Sandoni*, Bologna, Zanichelli, 1883, pp. 4-5.

¹³ *Per Ferrante Aporti*, «Il Risveglio Educativo», vol. VII, n. 36, 14 June 1891, p. 157.

¹⁴ A. Gambaro, *Ferrante Aporti e la pedagogia italiana dell'800*, in A. Gambaro (ed.), *Ferrante Aporti nel primo centenario della morte*, Brescia, Centro didattico nazionale per la scuola materna, 1962, pp. 93-105 (in particular, p. 104).

costs this method entailed»¹⁵ and which the Catholic Church intended as a fundamental instrument of moral and religious penetration among Italian youth.

Pietro Nigra – school inspector in Castiglione delle Stiviere – was central to this dispute. In 1890, in order to support the Committee's activities, he had founded the bimonthly bulletin «Il primo centenario della nascita di Ferrante Aporti»¹⁶, in which there were frequent articles by Antonino Parato and Giuseppe Sacchi – fervent supporters of Aporti's method – and a lively polemic with Adolfo Pick¹⁷ devoted to the "fröbelization" of all Italian kindergardens. As Clara Castagnoli has observed, in this bulletin «the validity of the Aportian method and its Italian character is repeatedly affirmed and compared to the Froebelian approach, whose "self-proclaimed supporters" "with disdain and slander would like to banish for replacing it with the arbitrary and irrational institutions and reforms of Aportian mysticism"»¹⁸.

The controversy spread. Lucillo Ambruzzi published an article on the journal «La Scuola Nazionale» in which he invited Italian educators to imitate the German *Kaiser* Wilhelm II, who had declared that he wanted to banish «everything smelled foreign» from German schools¹⁹.

A few weeks later Nigra took up the topic again in the same journal in a polemical article, in which he resumed the controversy with Pick and asked – after demonstrating how even in Germany Froebelian approach was not adopted everywhere and therefore contesting its definition as the «German national method» – how Italian educators could be accused «of making an out-of-place nationalism, a misunderstood love of homeland»²⁰ if they refused to adopt this foreign method. Nigra then added:

Those who study the history of Italian pedagogy without preconceived ideas, and with a wide-ranging and dispassionate mind, know very well how it was Aporti who gave the first and strongest impulse here in Italy to the re-establishment of the national method of education. They also know how this truly Italian method, gradually enriched by the studies and experiences of other distinguished educationalists, can today give a sure guarantee that it will one day reach its maximum perfection through the constant progress of science and educational ideas. Italy indeed possesses so much virtue and so much strength that it can do it on its own, without going begging in others' houses²¹.

¹⁵ F. De Giorgi, *Il tramonto dell'aportismo dal compimento dell'Unità d'Italia alla fine del secolo*, in M. Ferrari, M.L. Betri, C. Sideri (edd.), *Ferrante Aporti tra Chiesa, Stato e società civile. Questioni e influenze di lungo periodo*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2015, pp. 366-383 (in particular, p. 382).

¹⁶ Not to be confused with the «Bollettino del Comitato pel Primo Centenario» (Bulletin of the Committee for the First Centenary), published in Mantua first by Eredi Segna and then by Tipografia Mondovì between April 1891 and July 1892 and edited by Scipione Furga Gornini, which did not enter into educational disquisitions nor took sides in the diatribes that arose in those years between Aporti's and Fröbel's supporters, but limited itself to honouring the memory of the famous educationalist.

¹⁷ Founder in 1868 of the first Froebelian kindergarden in Venice and editor of the journal «L'Educazione dei Bambini» (The Education of Children).

¹⁸ C. Castagnoli, G. Ciaramelli (edd.), *Un secolo di stampa periodica mantovana: 1797-1897*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2002, p. 210.

¹⁹ L. Ambruzzi, *In tedescheria*, «La Scuola Nazionale», vol. II, n. 12, 24 December 1890, pp. 178-179.

²⁰ P. Nigra, *I giardinetti frobeliani e l'on. Gabelli*, «La Scuola Nazionale», vol. II, n. 16, 21 January 1891, pp. 243-245 (in particular, p. 244).

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 244.

Nigra concluded by saying that Italy was already rich in «pedagogical glory» and should certainly not «beg outside its borders» and proposed rather to work «towards the perfection of the national method restored by Aporti»²².

Nigra's violent attack had to provoke the reaction of the Cremonese educationalist Pietro Pasquali, a follower of Fröbel, who published another polemical article in the journal of the positivist pedagogy, in which he stated that «fighting a system because it was devised beyond the Alps, and fighting it in the name of nationality and patriotism» was puerile and that it did not matter «whether Fröbel was born in Germany», but «whether, and to what extent, his method can be applied by us». Pasquali then asked:

In what does the prosperity of the nation consist? And how can the school cooperate in the prosperity and honour of the nation? Perhaps by excluding the pedagogues coming from beyond the Alps? [...] This crusade against foreign ideas is opposed to progress; it is absurd, ignoble, useless, vain, presumptuous, impossible, because the assimilation of thought was always inevitable²³.

But animosities did not only arise between the supporters of the Italian Aporti and those of the Thuringian Fröbel. The “pedagogical chauvinism” descended into heated parochialism, on the basis of which the “small pedagogical homelands” ended up competing – in the best municipalistic tradition – for the origins of certain illustrious thinkers and educationalists, as if the environmental aspects and geographical context could not be disregarded to explain their greatness²⁴.

That same year, indeed, a Cremonese Committee for the honouring of Ferrante Aporti on the occasion of the centenary of his birth, chaired by Luigi Ratti, was also set up, thanks to the contribution granted by the Provincial Deputation of Cremona to the Commission for charity kindergardens of the city. The Cremonese Committee promoted a series of initiatives in the city where Aporti had set up his first charity kindergarden, including an official ceremony held on 20 September 1891 in which the well-known Cremonese educationalist Costantino Soldi delivered a speech²⁵. However, its role in the centenary celebrations was less important than the one played by the Mantuan Committee, contrary to what was to happen in 1927 on the occasion of the centenary celebrations of the foundation of first Aportian kindergarden, which saw the fascist

²² *Ibid.*, p. 245.

²³ P. Pasquali, *Muraglie della china*, «Il Risveglio Educativo», vol. VII, n. 21, I March 1891, p. 163.

²⁴ That said, it should be recalled that the celebrations were not limited to the two cities in Lombardy that contended for the illustrious educationalist. On 20 November 1891, the Turin Kindergarden Society organised a commemoration of Aporti, at which Antonino Parato spoke: *Ferrante Aporti: commemorazione letta da Antonio Parato nel primo centenario della nascita del fondatore degli asili italiani celebrato per cura della società degli asili infantili nel locale della Palestra ginnastica in Torino: 20 novembre 1891*, San Marino, Tipografia Subalpina, [1891]. A copy of the booklet is housed in: Archivio di Stato di Cremona, fond. «Comune di Cremona», series «Carteggio (1868-1946)», Category n. 32 «Oggetti vari», Cassetta n. 89, 1811 «Comitato per le onoranze a Ferrante Aporti».

²⁵ C. Soldi, *Ferrante Aporti e gli asili infantili: discorso letto per il centenario della nascita di Ferrante Aporti, solennemente celebratosi in Cremona il 20 settembre 1891*, Cremona, Tip. Interessi Cremonesi, 1891.

Cremona²⁶ – his adoptive homeland – finally take centre stage, while Mantua and San Martino dell'Argine remained on the sidelines.

Esterofilia (foreignophilia) and *esterofobia* (foreignophobia) thus alternated fiercely throughout these centenary celebrations, which revealed to be strongly influenced by feelings of identity and belonging that had nothing to do with the validity or otherwise of the educational theories expressed by the various thinkers and depended heavily on the collective imaginary developed over time within what we have already defined as "small pedagogical homelands", rather than on actual historical reality²⁷.

2. *The Contested Memory of Niccolò Tommaseo's "Dalmatian Italianness"*

Chauvinism and parochialism, however, were not the only sentiments that animated the public celebrations held in the late 19th century to commemorate great Italian and foreign educationalists. There were also cases in which distinct communities, even those far apart geographically, instead of competing for the commemoration of a personality, were able to twin together to promote shared celebrations. This is the case of the eminent linguist Niccolò Tommaseo, Minister of Education in the Provisional Government of the Republic of Venice in 1848-1849, native of the Dalmatian town of Šibenik in Croatia²⁸. Five years after his death, on 2 June 1878, a monument dedicated to him was unveiled in Settignano, made up of a plinth on which rested a marble statue by sculptor Leopoldo Costoli²⁹.

²⁶ In the 1920s and 1930s, Cremona played a central role in Italian political life due to the presence of Roberto Farinacci, one of the most prominent political figures of the Fascist regime.

²⁷ On these issues, in particular, see A. Arisi Rota, M. Ferrari, M. Morandi (edd.), *Patrioti si diventa. Luoghi e linguaggi di pedagogia patriottica nell'Italia unita*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2009.

²⁸ It should be recalled that Niccolò Tommaseo was not the only educationalist to be subjected to a process of Italianisation during his commemorative celebrations, as in the case of Enrico Pestalozzi, whose Italianness Luigi Credaro proved, reconstructing the passage of a branch of the Pestalozzi family from Chiavenna to Zurich through acute glottological inductions and historical investigations (L. Credaro, *L'italianità della stirpe di Enrico Pestalozzi*, «Rivista Pedagogica», vol. XIX, n. 2, February 1926, pp. 177-191).

²⁹ On this ceremony, in particular, see *Settignano e il monumento a Niccolò Tommaseo*, «L'Illustrazione Italiana», vol. V, 23, 9 June 1878, p. 411; G. Poletto, *Inaugurandosi un monumento a Niccolò Tommaseo in Settignano il giorno 2 giugno 1878*, Bergamo, Tipografia Pagnoncelli, 1878; C. Beltrami, *I monumenti che hanno fatto gli Italiani*, in C. Beltrami, G.C.F. Villa (edd.), *Scolpire gli eroi. La scultura al servizio della memoria*, Cinisello Balsamo, Silvana Editoriale, 2011, pp. 14-45 (in particolare, pp. 21-23). The history of this monument has been reconstructed in detail in: J. Meda, *Monumento a Niccolò Tommaseo a Settignano (1878)*, «Banca dati delle memorie pubbliche della scuola», vol. II, DOI: 10.53218/2051, published on 30.12.2022 (<https://www.memoriascolastica.it/memoria-pubblica/memorie-pubbliche/monumento-niccolo-tommaseo-settignano-1878>; last access: 17.06.2023).



Fig. 1. Photo postcard *Settignano – Monumento a Niccolò Tommaseo*³², n.d. (private collection of Juri Meda)

On that occasion, Temistocle Pampaloni – Mayor of Fiesole – stated:

This grave³⁰ and this monument make him part of our family; they unite him to us with an indissoluble, eternal bond; his memory, his genius, his glory now belong to us. And we are rightly proud of this, since great and virtuous men even from their graves benefit us, even when they are extinct, they radiate splendid light on all that surrounds them. Thus Settignano is honoured by the glory of that divine genius; for him this humble land will be remembered even by distant peoples; for him it will be celebrated by history; for him all those who hold in their kind hearts affection will make a pious pilgrimage³¹.

On the same occasion, on the facade of the Settignano church, in the square where the monument had been erected, the compatriots of the illustrious Dalmatian thinker and educationalist wanted to place a plaque, whose epigraph was dictated by Vincenzo Miagostovich³³: «THIS PLAQUE / ŠIBENIK / HOME TOWN OF NICCOLÒ TOMMASEO / PLACED ON 2 JUNE 1878 / AS A REMINDER / OF EVERLASTING AFFECTION / TO ITS GREAT CITIZEN / AND OF TRUE GRATITUDE / TO THE PEOPLE WHO VENERATE

³⁰ Reference is made here to the graves of Niccolò Tommaseo and his wife Diamante Tommaseo, located in a chapel in the cemetery of Settignano. The epigraph on his tombstone, dictated by Augusto Conti, reads: «OF NICCOLÒ TOMMASEO / BORN 1802 IN ŠIBENIK / DIED 1874 IN FLORENCE / THE NAME IS ENOUGH / FOR THEM TO REMEMBER / HOW MUCH THEY OWE HIM / MAGNANIMOUS CITIZEN AND WRITER / IMMORTAL GRATITUDE». In the following years, the grave actually became a pilgrimage destination for admirers of Tommaseo (cf. P. Mazzoleni, *Una visita alla tomba di N. Tommaseo*, Zara, Tip. S. Artale, 1912).

³¹ XXXI maggio MDCCCXCVI. *Niccolò Tommaseo e il suo monumento in Sebenico*, Sebenico, Editore Paolo Mazzoleni, 1897, pp. 256-257.

³² On the use of postcards during the 20th century to commemorate illustrious compatriots, enhance local cultural heritage and promote feelings of belonging, also with reference to the world of school and education, see the interesting contribution of M. Brunelli, “Minor Educators”? *Traces of the Public Memory of the School, between the Official History of Education and the Community’s History. The Case of Emidio Consorti (1841-1913)*, *infra*. More generally, on the celebratory and propagandistic function of postcards also in the educational context, see A. Viñao Frago, M.J. Martínez Ruiz-Funes, P.L. Moreno Martínez, *Tarjeta postal ilustrada y educación (España, siglos XIX-XX)*, Murcia, Editum, 2016.

³³ Miagostovich published incognito a detailed account of Settignano’s celebrations in Zadar’s newspaper «Il Dalmata», entitled: *Monumento in Settignano a Niccolò Tommaseo*, published in two issues («Il Dalmata», n. 42, 25 May 1878; «Il Dalmata», n. 47, 12 June 1878).



Fig. 2. Engraving *Settignano. Inaugurazione del Monumento a Niccolò Tommaseo* by Francesco Canedi based on a drawing by Odoardo Borrani; taken from: «L'illustrazione Italiana», vol. V, n. 25, 23 June 1878, p. 408 (private collection of Juri Meda)

HIS MEMORY». The shared celebration of the “Great Dalmatian” ended with the sending of a parchment by the Municipality of Florence to the Municipality of Šibenik, to thank it for its heartfelt participation in the public honours, on which was written:

To Šibenik, which honours its Niccolò Tommaseo, the City where he lived his last years as a blind seer and where his remains lie; the homeland of Dante and of the national idiom, grateful to the illustrious Dalmatian, who, as an artist and philosopher, lovingly studied the Poet’s thought and collected the treasures of the Italian language, sends fraternal greetings in the communion of cherished memories³⁴.

Celebrations continued in the following years. On 22 March 1882 – on the 80th anniversary of his birth – a monument to Tommaseo by the sculptor Francesco Barzaghi was unveiled in Campo Santo Stefano in Venice.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 259.



Fig. 3. Drawing *Venezia – Il monumento a Niccolò Tommaseo (di Barzaghi) inaugurato il 22 marzo* by Emilio Longoni based on a photograph by Paolo Salviati; taken from: «*Illustrazione Italiana*», vol. IX, n. 17, 23 April 1882, p. 1 (private collection of Juri Meda)

On 17 March 1890, a plaque was placed on the house where Tommaseo was born in Šibenik. Finally, on 31 May 1896, the bronze monument by the sculptor Ettore Ximenes was unveiled in his home town³⁵.

On that occasion – as further confirmation of the «communion of cherished memories» already witnessed during the celebrations in Settignano – the *Società Veneziana per l'Industria delle Conterie* (Venetian Society for the Glass Industry) sent the Municipality of Šibenik an artistically executed frame of coloured glass dots, in which – framed by the winged lion of Saint Mark and other friezes – was written:

Of strong wit endowed / Niccolò Tommaseo / honoured / his native Dalmatia / and his new homeland Italy. / He was a man of letters, a poet, a philosopher / who linked his name to history. / Šibenik / with great solemnity / inaugurates a splendid monument / to his worthy son / and of the happy event / to the town hall of the pleasant city / the glassworker's society / of Venice / offers in memory³⁶.

The «communion of cherished memories» – inspired by the historical feelings of brotherhood towards the Dalmatian populations, considered culturally Italian, which found confirmation in the figure of the illustrious thinker who had then elected Florence and Settignano as his adoptive homeland – ceased with the First World War and the Italian Regency of Carnaro. In 1925, in fact, speaking of Tommaseo's «Dalmatian Italianness», the historian of literature Isidoro Del Lungo³⁷ during his speech at the congress organised by the *Associazione Magistrale "Nicolò Tommaseo"* («Nicolò Tommaseo» Teachers' Association) in Zara, held «under the sign of the most unrestrained nationalism and exaggerated exaltation

³⁵ The complex realisation process of the Tommaseo monument in Šibenik is reconstructed in detail in: C. Beltrami, *I monumenti che hanno fatto gli italiani*, in Beltrami, Villa (edd.), *Scolpire gli eroi*, cit., pp. 21-23. On the celebrations held in his home town in 1896, see also *XXXI Maggio MDCCCXCVI. Niccolò Tommaseo e il suo monumento in Sebenico*, Sebenico, Paolo Mazzoleni, 1897.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 261.

³⁷ In 1924 Isidoro Del Lungo dictated the epigraph that the *Pro Dalmatia* Society in Florence, the Dante Alighieri Society and the Folk High School in Settignano engraved on a plaque that was added to the monument in Settignano on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of his death.

of fascism»³⁸, stated:

The reality of an intact Dalmatia, which Niccolò Tommaseo would once again invoke from God, but greeting in the new fortunes of the great Latin homeland the Dalmatian Italianness, not only of language, tradition and bloodline, but also of participation – blessed by God – in the life and future of the unified Nation³⁹.

Tommaseo ceased to be a symbol of Adriatic brotherhood and was artificially elevated to an emblem of “Dalmatian Italianness”.

Tommaseo’s shared Italian-Dalmatian memory ceased to exist at the end of Second World War, when the Adriatic Question entered its most dramatic phase. As the Croatian historian Boško Knežić has effectively reconstructed, in February 1945, the poet Vladimir Nazor – president of the National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Croatia, which joined the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1945 – delivered a speech at the foot of the monument inaugurated in Šibenik in 1896, in which he stated:

The only Italian optant⁴⁰ I can see in Šibenik is behind me. Now man of bronze, cold and hardened, cultured and endowed with various talents, who, however, did not fully share the feelings of the people from which he arose⁴¹.

The monument was demolished a few days later. The commemorative plaque placed on 1890 on Tommaseo’s house of birth suffered the same sad fate. In order to confirm the



Fig. 4. Photo postcard *Sebenico – Monumento a Niccolò Tommaseo (dello scultore Ettore Ximenes)*, n.d. (private collection of Juri Meda)

³⁸ A. Dessardo, *L'Associazione Magistrale "Niccolò Tommaseo". Storia di maestri cattolici, 1906-1930*, Roma, Ave, 2018, p. 211.

³⁹ *L'italianità dalmatica di Niccolò Tommaseo. Discorso di Isidoro Del Lungo per il Congresso della Niccolò Tommaseo a Zara*, Firenze, Le Monnier, 1925, p. 30.

⁴⁰ Between 1945 and 1946, thousands of Italians fled the cities of Istria and Dalmatia to escape Yugoslavian persecution and seek refuge in Italy. In 1947, the Italians who remained within the Yugoslavian borders were offered the option between Slavic and Italian citizenship. Those who opted for Italian citizenship (i.e. Italian optant) were immediately expelled from the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

⁴¹ B. Knežić, *La lapide e il monumento di Niccolò Tommaseo in Sebenico: storia di un'ingiustizia*, «Opinioni», n. 3, June 2019, pp. 28-30; by the same author, see also Id., *“Da Sebenico un figlio vindice nel bronzo ascolta...”. Nikola Tommaseo: od književnog uzora do političke ikone*, Zagreb-Zadar, Hrvatska sveučilišna naklada – Sveučilište u Zadru, 2019.

ancient «communion of cherished memories» – swept suddenly away by the rushing wind of history – a hand of the Šibenik bronze statue, the only part of the monument that survived demolition, was stolen and consigned to the Dalmatian School of Saints George and Tryphon in Venice, where it is still exhibited today⁴². The Dalmatian monument, the “twin” of those in Settignano and Venice, has thus become – in spite of itself – a relic with a strong symbolic value, the testimony of a deep wound dug into the memory of the Dalmatian population, which has not even spared the statue dedicated to an intellectual and man of letters, turned over time into an emblem of an “intolerable cultural otherness”.

Conclusions

The public honours paid to an educator or pedagogue on the occasion of the centenary of his birth or death, as well as any other anniversary, serves to immortalise his memory, and – achieving this result – inevitably ends up destoricising him, abstracting him from his time in order to project him into the present and show him to a local or national community, so that they may remember him for what he did, identify themselves with his greatness and draw lessons for their own time⁴³. The centenary celebrations, therefore, lead to the actualisation of the teaching experience of a great teacher or of the educational theories of a great educationalist. Besides celebrating a figure from the past for his/her extraordinariness by publicly remembering him/her, they also lead one to ask – concretely – how to reproduce that educational experience and how to apply those educational theories in the present time.

We know that memory is not history. According to the definition formulated by Maurice Halbwachs, indeed, memory is a reconstruction of the past using data provided by the present⁴⁴. It does not study past events by placing them in their historical context, but rather tends to relate them to the present, to make them examples, providing (often distorting) reading keys to show their topicality and reproducibility.

The centenary commemorations analysed here therefore had two direct consequences: on the one hand, the appropriation of the figure celebrated in order to consolidate the identity of a given community, firmly anchoring it to a more or less extensive place (municipality, province, region or nation); on the other, the actualisation of his/her message, aimed at its projection into the present with the risk, however, of exposing it to considerable distortions and instrumentalisation.

⁴² Knežić, *La lapide e il monumento di Niccolò Tommaseo in Sebenico*, cit., p. 29. This hand is also reproduced in the volume Beltrami, Villa (edd.), *Scolpire gli eroi*, cit., p. 109.

⁴³ More in general, on this topic, see V. Minuto, *Monumental memory of school in post-unitarian Italy*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», XVI, n. 1, 2021, pp. 213-255.

⁴⁴ Cf. M. Halbwachs, *La memoria collettiva*, Milano, Unicopli, 1996, p. 119 (original edition: *La mémoire collective*, Paris, Albin Michel, 1950). More generally, on Halbwachs and his theories, see G. Truc, *Memory of places and places of memory: for a Halbwachsian socio-ethnography of collective memory*, «International Social Science Journal», vol. 62, n. 203-204, 2012, pp. 147-159.

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The School and Its Many Pasts

History is not memory; both, however, affect the way we perceive the past. In recent years, an increasing number of studies have focused on memory in order to critically analyze shared narratives of the past and their implications. Memory studies not only allow us to expand our knowledge about the past, but also help us to define the way in which today's people, social groups and public bodies look at it and interpret or re-interpret it. In this sense, school memory is not only of interest as a gateway to the school's past but also as a tool to understand what they know or believe they know about the school of the past and how much what they know corresponds to reality or is influenced by prejudices and stereotypes deeply rooted in common sense. These volumes aim to address these complex issues and broaden the perspective from which the schooling phenomenon is analyzed to better understand the school and its many pasts.

Juri Meda is associate professor in History of Education at the University of Macerata and member of the Executive Committee of the International Standing Conference for the History of Education.

Lucia Paciaroni is senior research fellow in History of Education at the University of Macerata and member of the editorial board of the international scientific journal «History of Education & Children's Literature».

Roberto Sani is full professor in History of Education at the University of Macerata and editor-in-chief of the international scientific journal «History of Education & Children's Literature».



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