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premise

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3Premise

Marcello Verga*

In recent years, possibly following an Italian re-publication of Huizinga's essays on Renaissance, many have referred to the metaphor of Renaissance as "*un cambiamento di marea*". "*Il passaggio dal Medioevo all'età moderna* – as the famous Dutch historian wrote – *deve essere visto (e come potrebbe essere altrimenti?) non come una grande svolta, ma come una larga serie di onde che vengono a frangersi sulla spiaggia*"¹. In this context, one might wonder whether the word "transition" is an apt descriptor for such a break, which defined Western Europe on a political level, as well as having important consequences for Eastern regions.

In their thoughtful introduction, the editors of this volume investigate the meaning of this word and the use made of it in Italian and Spanish historiography, here invited to confront each other over the changes which marked European society across the 17th and the first decades of the 18th century². There is no doubt that these decades marked an authentic turning point for the domestic narratives of these two historiographies. Indeed, the "Istituto Storico Italiano per l'età moderna e contemporanea", founded in 1934 in Rome, dedicated the first volume of the series "Fonti per la storia italiana" (1935) to the edition of *Relazioni di ambasciatori sabaudi, genovesi e veneti durante il periodo della Grande Alleanza e della guerra di successione di Spagna, 1693-1713*³, precisely in order to stress how much that period's wars – and in particular the Spanish War of Succession – marked a deep break in Italian domestic history, as Gioacchino Volpe wrote in his famous essay *Principi del Risorgimento nel '700 italiano*⁴.

On this account, it is worth mentioning the important essay by Leibniz, the title of which is particularly meaningful: *Finis saeculi novam rerum faciem aperuit*. It was written at the beginning of the new century, and it was intended as a comment on the new political situation that was emerging in Europe after the disappearance of the Spanish Habsburg dynasty. This essay – first published in 1861 in the third volume of Leibniz's *Oeuvres*, edited by Foucher de Careil⁵ – is one of the many that Leibniz, at the time under the service of the Viennese Habsburgs, devoted to the political affairs of his times.

The "political" Leibniz tackled many challenges during the years of the War of the Spanish Succession, serving as *Hofrat* to Emperor Leopold I, to Joseph I and to Archduke Charles (who

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¹ J. Huizinga, "Il problema del Rinascimento", in W. van de Boer (ed.), *Le immagini della storia. Scritti 1905-1941*, Torino, Einaudi 1993, p. 194. A more recent republication is: *Il problema del rinascimento. Con un saggio su "Rinascimento e realismo". Introduzione di Gabriele Pedullà*, Roma, Donzelli 2015. The passage is also quoted by Silvia Mantini - one of the authors of this book – who used it as incipit for the introduction of her recent volume, *Appartenenze storiche. Mutamenti e transizioni al confine del regno di Napoli fra Seicento e Settecento*, Ariccia, Aracne, 2016.

² *La transizione europa tra XVII e XVIII secolo. Riflessioni e progetti. Corte, politica, cultura e società (1665-1725)*: such is the title of the workshop organized by the Dipartimento di storia moderna e contemporanea dell'Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, in collaboration with Red Sucesión, edited by Antonio Álvarez Ossorio, Cinzia Cremonini and Elena Riva.

³ C. Morandi (ed.), *Relazioni di ambasciatori sabaudi, genovesi e veneti durante il periodo della Grande Alleanza e della guerra di successione di Spagna (1693-1713)*, Bologna, N. Zanichelli, 1935.

⁴ G. Volpe, "Principi del Risorgimento nel '700 italiano", in «Rivista storica italiana», 1936.

⁵ L. A. Foucher de Careil (ed.), *Oeuvres. Leibniz. Publiées pour la première fois d'après les manuscrits originaux*, Hildesheim-New York, G. Olms, 1969 (reproduction Paris, 1861-1875).

aspired to the throne and became Emperor in 1711 under the name Charles VI). Remarkably, he was also able to draw the attention of the Viennese imperial chancellor's office to the possibility of claiming the Medicean possessions, having foreseen the extinction of the Florentine dynasty as early as 1711.

Finis saeculi reminds us that like Leibniz, a considerable portion of educated and politically informed European opinion (cfr. the political battle of *pamphlets* that animated English political life⁶) carefully observed the developments of these decades. These involved the relationships between states (the word "equilibrio" – described as a "new word" by Muratori – became prominent in this context), but also international policy and changes to the titles needed to claim territorial sovereignty.

Leibniz intervened directly on these topics some years later with *Le manifest contenant les droits de Charles III, roi d'Espagne et les justes motifs de son expedition* (1704). As one may infer from the title itself, this essay was written in support of the Archduke Charles of Habsburg, who was then about to land on the Iberian peninsula in order to lay claim to the Spanish crown.

In this essay, Leibniz stressed the need to respect the "*Veritable sentiment des peuples et des interesses*" in the assignation of the Spanish realms. As the quote below highlights, Leibniz relies on a tradition which – beginning in the last decades of the 17th century – compared populations' characters and, most importantly, their styles and literary productions, as a means to building a "geography of temperaments" (Marc Fumaroli), and indeed a hierarchy of European culture.

It is also necessary to recall the *Aja Declaration*, issued by William of Orange on October 10, 1688, in preparation of his arrival in England. The opening words of the document, written by Caspar Fagel and translated into English by Gilbert Burnet, seem to employ the same tone as Leibniz's essay:

- "It is both certain and evident to all men, that the public peace and happiness of any state or kingdom cannot be preserved where the law, liberties, and customs, established by the lawful authority in it, are openly transgressed and annulled [...] being the greatness and security both of kings, royal families, and of all such as are in authority, as well as the happiness of their subjects and people, depend in a most especial manner upon the exact observations and maintenance of these their laws, liberties, and customs"⁷

Of course, one should keep in mind the instrumental character of declarations, pamphlets and manifestos that accompanied the wars of successions in the first part of 18th century Europe. However, we should also pay attention to the innovation in topics, references and neologisms – such as "equilibrio" – that marked European political culture in the decades this volume studies. Among these words – which so characterized the transition (should we wish to use this terminology) towards the modern European society which would emerge from the wars of succession – one cannot avoid recalling David Hume and his essay *On the Parties* (1742): «Parties from *principle*, especially abstract speculative principle, are known only to modern times, and are,

⁶ R.M. Lopez Campillo, *Imagen y propaganda política en la Guerra De Sucesión Española. Daniel Defoe Al Servicio Del Gobierno De Ana Estuardo,2014*; P. Losa Serrano (ed.), *Guerra de Sucesión española y la opinión pública hispano-británica,..... 2014*)

perhaps, the most extraordinary and unaccountable *phænomēnon*, that has yet appeared in human affairs ».