

DO AS THE SPANIARDS DO.  
THE 1821 PIEDMONT INSURRECTION AND THE BIRTH OF  
CONSTITUTIONALISM

Haced como los españoles.  
Los movimientos de 1821 en Piamonte y el origen del  
constitucionalismo

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**Abstract**

Despite the local reference historiography, the 1821 Piedmont insurrection still lacks a reading that gives due weight to the historical-constitutional aspect. When Carlo Alberto, the “revolutionary” Prince of Carignano, granted the Cádiz Constitution, after the abdication of Vittorio Emanuele I, a crisis began in the secular history of the dynasty and the kingdom of Sardinia: for the first time freedoms and rights of representation broke the direct pledge of allegiance, typical of the absolute state, between kings and people. The new political system was not autochthonous but looked to that of Spain, among the many possible models. Using the extensive available bibliography, I analyzed the national and international influences of that

short historical season. Moreover I emphasized the social and geographic origin of the leaders of the insurrection (i.e. nobility and bourgeoisie, core and periphery of the State) and the consequences of their actions. Even if the insurrection was brought down by the convergence of the royalist forces and the Austrian army, its legacy weighed on the dynasty. In 1823, during the war between Spain and France, Carlo Alberto became the hero of the Trocadero: a reactionary choice that influenced the future of Savoy. Certainly the shadow of the Cádiz Constitution accompanied Carlo Alberto until 1848, when he granted the Statuto. The pre-unification political season was marked by a more moderate text of the Constitution. Over time, the Cádiz Constitution became a symbol of the freedom and the exiles of 1821 went to fight in Europe for those peoples who were oppressed by the Holy Alliance.

### **Keywords**

Cádiz Constitution; Carlo Alberto of Savoia; monarchy; revolution; repression.

### **Resumen**

Aunque no falta una historiografía local de referencia, los movimientos en Piamonte de 1821 todavía carecen de una lectura que otorgue el peso adecuado al aspecto histórico-constitucional. Cuando el *revolucionario* príncipe de Carignano Carlos Alberto, después de la abdicación de Víctor Emmanuel I, concedió la Constitución abrió una crisis en la historia secular de la dinastía y el reino de Cerdeña: las libertades y los derechos de representación rompieron por primera vez el pacto de fidelidad directa entre el rey y el pueblo característico del Estado absoluto. El nuevo sistema político no era autóctono y, entre los muchos modelos posibles, miraba al de España. Usando la extensa bibliografía disponible, este artículo se adentra en las influencias nacionales e internacionales de ese efímero episodio. Pero no solo eso: también hace hincapié en el origen social y geográfico de los protagonistas de la revolución (entre la nobleza y la burguesía, entre el centro y la periferia del Estado) y las consecuencias de sus acciones. Si la insurgencia fue derribada por las fuerzas realistas convergentes y el ejército austriaco, su legado pesaba sobre la dinastía. En 1823, durante la guerra entre España y Francia, Carlos Alberto se convirtió en el héroe del Trocadero: una elección reaccionaria que influyó en el futuro del monarca de Saboya. Ciertamente la sombra de la constitución de Cádiz acompañó a Carlos Alberto hasta 1848, el año de la concesión del Estatuto. La evolución hacia un texto constitucional más moderado marcará así la temporada política preunitaria. La constitución de Cádiz se convirtió en un símbolo de libertad con el tiempo, y los exiliados de 1821 fueron a luchar en Europa por los pueblos oprimidos por la Santa Alianza.

### **Palabras clave**

Constitución de Cádiz; Carlos Alberto de Saboya; monarquía; revolución; Represión.

## CONTENTS

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I. INTRODUCTION. II. PREAMBLE TO THE FACTS. INTERNAL DRIVES, EXTERNAL DRIVES. III. BETWEEN MODERATES AND CONSPIRATORS: CONSTITUTIONAL VIEWS. IV. CARDS ON THE TABLE: THE FACE OF THE REVOLUTIONARIES. V. CENTRE AND PERIPHERY: THE INSURRECTION IN ALESSANDRIA AND TURIN. VI. EVERYTHING EXCEPT THE SPANISH CONSTITUTION: A SOLUTION IMPOSSIBLE TO FIND. VII. EPILOGUE: A STILLBORN CONSTITUTION. VIII. CONCLUSIONS. *BIBLIOGRAPHY.*

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### I. INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

By turning the spotlight on historical events, anniversaries help the scientific community and others to reflect on steps so far taken and to open new avenues of research. The bicentenary of the 1820 and 1821 uprisings cannot but bear fruit in this sense, inserting the phenomenon into the most recent historiographical currents, currents which by now inevitably outline transnational, or, more accurately, global, panoramas. In the context of studies on European sectarian, insurrectional and constitutional movements in the period following the Vienna Congress, Turin, and Piedmont more generally, have remained in the background, or at least isolated. This has not necessarily been due to lack of interest, since from the start thousands of pages have been written about the insurrection of January to April 1821 in the Savoyard States, but rather because the event has for a long time been interpreted as an ephemeral epilogue to an autochthonous event, a parenthesis in Sabaudian history. Somewhat clearer are the political elements that place the Piedmontese uprising within a more general historical process that involved Spain, Portugal, and the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies as well as, in hindsight, the dynamics of the entire European Restoration, as Gonzalo Butrón Prida, Vittorio Scotti Douglas and Hans Späth have ably shown<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Butrón (2006); Scotti Douglas (2011); Späth (2012).

The fact that Italian high school and university textbooks have dedicated only a few lines to the Piedmontese insurrection of 1821<sup>3</sup> does not mean that historiography, even academic, interested in the history of the Kingdom of Sardinia in the nineteenth century has neglected the subject far from it. To cite the most significant example, Narciso Nada (1925-2004), for many years professor of Risorgimento history at the University of Turin, dedicated much of his research to the study of this political period<sup>4</sup>. As early as 1972, in the first issue of *Studi Piemontesi* (to this day an eclectic reference journal for research, not only historical, on the region), Nada began his collaboration with the periodical by launching a sort of manifesto of studies of 1821<sup>5</sup>. That year was particularly profitable for the scholar: after reconstructing the uprisings<sup>6</sup>, events that had not been updated since the basic but by then obsolete work of Torta<sup>7</sup> and the various works published for the centenary of 1921<sup>8</sup>, he oversaw the publication of the important memoirs of Emanuele Pes Di Villamarina, a key figure of that brief constitutional period<sup>9</sup>. And, to summarise the various conferences held in the 1980s and 1990s to pay homage to the main protagonists of that era (Guglielmo Moffa di Lisio<sup>10</sup>, Silvio Pellico<sup>11</sup>, Santorre di Santarosa<sup>12</sup>), Nada outlined historiographical overviews<sup>13</sup>, reaching the climax with the chapter dedicated to 1821 published in the *Storia d'Italia*, edited by Giuseppe Galasso<sup>14</sup>.

By then, however, there had already appeared the magnum opus on the 1821 Piedmontese uprising: the meticulous work by Giorgio Marsengo and Giuseppe Parlato which, through a painstaking examination of the existing bibliography and a systematic scrutiny of the sources conserved in the Turin State Archive, brought to light hundreds of records of those involved in the revolt. The work marked a turning point in studies on the subject, not only for the structured nature of the research, but also for the attempt to delineate

<sup>3</sup> Sabbatucci and Vidotto (2009): 113.

<sup>4</sup> Viarengo (2005): 666-678.

<sup>5</sup> Nada (1972a): 144-160.

<sup>6</sup> Nada (1972b): 167-198.

<sup>7</sup> Torta (1908).

<sup>8</sup> Lemmi *et al.* (1923); Passamonti *et al.* (1926); Rossi and Demagistris (1927).

<sup>9</sup> Pes di Villamarina (1972).

<sup>10</sup> Nada (1982); Nada (1991): 44-59.

<sup>11</sup> Nada (1984a): 23-30.

<sup>12</sup> Nada (1984b): 5-12.

<sup>13</sup> Nada (1991): 65-73.

<sup>14</sup> Nada and Notario (1993):151-161.

causes and consequences, individual endeavours and common destinies, social affiliations and lines of action<sup>15</sup>.

But in all of this the decisive constitutional question has so far been overshadowed by two other, admittedly legitimate, questions: on the one hand, the nature of secret societies in Piedmont, their composition and connections with the Italian sectarian world, and, on the other, the vacillating attitude of the Prince of Carignano, Charles Albert, a personage caught between liberal tendencies and absolutist demands. In the first case, the historiographical question has been justified little by little by the need to portray the social landscape of the bourgeoisie, and of the liberal nobility of Savoy overtaken by the national discourse, as the initial nucleus of the nascent (moderate) Risorgimento ruling class<sup>16</sup>. This thesis has recently been met with rather unconvincing criticism<sup>17</sup>. In the second case, the figure of Charles Albert, seen as a forerunner or false friend of the constitutional question, has loomed over events, invalidating historical discourse, which has at times been reduced to an argument fuelling the myth or counter-myth of the king presented by historiographies of different dispositions, from the Sabaudian one to the democratic one<sup>18</sup>.

The Spanish constitution (key element not only at European level<sup>19</sup>) has thus remained an adjunct used from time to time to determine the degree of democratic feeling among the Savoy ruling class or the extent of the liberal contamination of Charles Albert. This despite the fact that a first important attempt at contextualisation, to which this essay will make frequent reference, was recently made by the legal historian Gian Savino Pene Vidari (1940-2020) during a conference held in Rome by the Institute for the History of the Italian Risorgimento to mark the bicentenary of the *carta gaditana*<sup>20</sup>. The aim of this contribution is therefore to shift the focus to the constitutional issue, construed as an elaboration, but also as the myth and reality of the Kingdom of Sardinia in 1821, to borrow the felicitous expression used by

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<sup>15</sup> Marsengo and Parlato (1982-1986).

<sup>16</sup> Talamo (2000): 463-468.

<sup>17</sup> Lo Faso di Serradifalco (2016).

<sup>18</sup> Omodeo (1940); Nada (1980).

<sup>19</sup> Castells (1989): 117-132; De Francesco (1998): 273-286; Scotti Douglas (2001): 257-262; Fernández Sarasola (2002): 359-466; Gil Novales (2011): 97-127; Arnabat Mata (2012): 47-64; Rodríguez López-Brea (2013): 561-594; Rodríguez López-Brea (2014): 115-138; Carantoña Álvarez (2014): 21-40; Corciulo (2015): 583-592; Eastman and Sobrevilla Perea (2015): 1-18; Romano (2015): 7-24.

<sup>20</sup> Pene Vidari (2015): 559-582.

Giorgio Spini in one of his classic studies<sup>21</sup>. Retracing in this way the events and the protagonists' actions of those months makes it possible to give proper emphasis to a history that, while transitory, was a harbinger of a new way of understanding freedom<sup>22</sup>. While in 1848 the constitutional reference model was no longer the Iberian one —as Massimo D'Azeglio observed to his brother Robert: “Viva la costituzione ma non *coula de Spagna* [in Piedmontese]”<sup>23</sup>— the statute bestowed by Charles Albert with the “loyalty of a king and affection of a father” on 4 March 1848 was modelled on the Orléan charter of 1830 and the Belgian one of 1831. The constitution was seen as the attainment of a mature freedom<sup>24</sup>. The memory of 1821, on the other hand, was by then associated with an “exaggerated,” outdated and immature season that had brought nothing good - other than an acknowledgement of the need to eliminate forever the *Ancien régime*.

## II. PREAMBLE TO THE FACTS. INTERNAL DRIVES, EXTERNAL DRIVES

On 31 December 1820, New Year's Eve, members of the Piedmont Senate, of the Chamber of Accounts, of the Turin city council, and the teaching staff of the university were gathered, as they were every year, in the Hall of the Swiss Guards of the austere Royal Palace of Turin. They were all ready to give the sovereign, Victor Emanuel I, a seasonal greeting with the traditional hand-kiss<sup>25</sup>. But no-one could have imagined the words that the president of the highest magistracy of the kingdom, the Senate of Piedmont, Count Guglielmo Borgarelli, was about to say to the king. Taking the word publicly, he said: “Sire, deign to remember that the ancient laws of the state are the guardians of security and of your splendour; do not allow indiscreet hands to touch them: novelties can lead to great misfortunes”.

There was a moment of extreme embarrassment. The king listened in silence and then moved on<sup>26</sup>. The “indiscreet hands” were those of the minister of the interior, Prospero Balbo, who since taking office in September 1819, replacing Borgarelli himself, had never ceased trying to reform one of the states best “restored” by the Vienna Congress. Until then his greatest aspira-

<sup>21</sup> Spini (1950).

<sup>22</sup> Ferrando Badía (1959); Colombo (1998): 131-157; Butrón (2012a): 37-54.

<sup>23</sup> D'Azeglio (1988): 38.

<sup>24</sup> Colombo (2003).

<sup>25</sup> Gentile (2013): 159-160.

<sup>26</sup> Dionisotti (1881): 30.

tion had been to convert the Kingdom of Savoy from an absolute monarchy to a “consultative” monarchy, creating a council of state and reforming communal and provincial administrations<sup>27</sup>.

Certainly, none of this should have given rise to thoughts of a constitution: if anything it was an alignment with a Napoleonic past, similar to what was happening in Naples, where many institutions established by Gioacchino Murat had been maintained, or in the newly created Kingdom of Lombardy-Veneto, where the model of consultative monarchy had found the right compromise between eighteenth-century Habsburg reformism and the administration of the Kingdom of Italy under Bonaparte<sup>28</sup>. But in the climate that prevailed in southern Europe, in the midst of the Spanish, Portuguese and Neapolitan insurrections, the court of Turin ended up caught in the Holy Alliance’s cross hairs: to the point that any adjustment to the absolute monarchy with the creation of a collegial body would have been ill received, especially since in Vienna there was a not unfounded suspicion that the reform would not be limited to the proposal of the moderate Balbo.

Indeed, for too long a rumour had been circulating that Turin was not unsympathetic to a constitutional-representative solution. To be sure, it was not in court circles that constitutions were being discussed, but a section of the younger generation of nobles and of the Turin intelligentsia —participant in the Napoleonic administration— had nurtured a desire to bring about a radical change of government, albeit always in deference to the monarchy. They were liberals —such as Santorre di Santarosa, Luigi Provana, Luigi Ornato, Carlo Emanuele Asinari di San Marzano and Cesare Balbo (the last two, respectively sons of the foreign minister and the home affairs minister)— and they pleaded the cause for a constitutional king.

The foreign ambassadors to Turin helped to incubate this development instead of simply observing, as Charles Albert would remark after the events of 1821. In fact, their salons were often used as meeting places for a very numerous “society”, in which all the liberal-thinking foreigners who travelled to Turin became involved<sup>29</sup>: from the Frenchman Emeric-Joseph Dalberg, who actually went as far as presenting a constitution plan to Balbo<sup>30</sup>, to the representative for Bavaria, the Count of Sciboltdors, “known as one of the importers of the liberal contagion among the patrician youth of Turin”<sup>31</sup>; and finally to Eusebio de

<sup>27</sup> Romagnani (1990): 468-495.

<sup>28</sup> Soresina (2015): 30-35, 46-51.

<sup>29</sup> Fiorini (1900): 3-4.

<sup>30</sup> Stern (1895-96): 638-642.

<sup>31</sup> Spini (1950): 36.

Bardají y Azara who, until the government of Madrid closed the embassy at the end of 1820 and before reaching the Spanish capital to take the post of interior minister in the new government in spring 1821, was a fervent advocate of the constitutional model<sup>32</sup>, so much so that he did not hesitate to proclaim “out loud, in the salons of the subalpine capital, that the King of Sardinia needed to imitate the example of the two Bourbons before being forced to do so by a popular insurrection”<sup>33</sup>. Direct testimony to the Spanish ambassador’s adherence to the constitution came from Cesare Balbo, son of Prospero: “Bardají [...] who mixed with us at home, called the uprising [of Riego] a childish game; but on the day that it became revolution, he blessed it, which was a scandal; and a worse scandal is that he praised the same constitution to our young people”<sup>34</sup>.

### III. BETWEEN MODERATES AND CONSPIRATORS: CONSTITUTIONAL VIEWS

In short, a week after the New Year’s Day when Count Borgarelli sounded the death knells of the reformism of Prospero Balbo, the minister’s son, Cesare, again put pen to paper to write some personal reflections on the “current state of Piedmont”. It was then an unquestionable fact that there was an “expectation” of a representative constitution in Turin: no “private man”, not even “the calmest, most retiring, most alien to public matters doubted it”.

For Cesare Balbo only those in government seemed unwilling to face reality. And yet, opinions in favour of a constitution had been clearly expressed for six months in many written works, “not really signed, but neither *désavoués* by anyone, spread everywhere with amazing speed, read and approved, I don’t mean among friends, two by two, or in secret societies or private rooms, but in public places and in the offices and the secretariats of State, in the palace of the King”<sup>35</sup>. It was 9 January 1821. The fact that tension in Turin was palpable could be seen clearly a few days later when, following the arrest of four university students who had appeared in the theatre dressed in Jacobean berets and the colours of the Carbonari, the governor of Turin, Ignazio Thaon di Revel, called in the army to break the occupation of the university that had taken place in protest. There were many injuries among the students.

<sup>32</sup> Butrón (2012b): 73-97.

<sup>33</sup> Romagnani (1990): 487.

<sup>34</sup> Ricotti (1856): 372.

<sup>35</sup> Passamonti (1926): 307.



It matters little that the action of the offenders had been more light-hearted than political, the “preventive” military intervention ordered by Revel without consulting Prospero Balbo, who combined the office of interior minister with that of education, was a clear sign of schism in the king’s council: between the moderates, like Prospero Balbo, who were calling for reform, and the reactionaries, like Revel, who were more realistic than the king and who had been determined to quell any public order problem for fear of revolution<sup>36</sup>.

In the light of the facts, on 17 January Cesare Balbo penned further considerations. “A faction” had been born and raised in Turin that he did not know whether to call “carbonari or something else”. The fact was that the secret societies were “widespread in every class and condition of people” in order to promote the Spanish constitution, the expulsion of foreigners and the unity of Italy. This had already created a dichotomy between a constitutional, moderate party and the “faction of the Spanish constitution” with “extreme” opinions. His conclusion ended with a question mark: “between a government that does not see, a party that does not act, and a faction that sees and acts, who will win?”<sup>37</sup>.

Young Balbo, at that time a lieutenant-colonel in the Monferrato brigade, spoke with knowledge of the facts. He had come to know Napoleonic France well and he had also known Spain well, becoming fascinated by it during his stay in Madrid in 1816-19 as an embassy gentleman alongside his father, who was appointed in loco minister of the King of Sardinia<sup>38</sup>. He undertook historical studies, developing research on the Iberian wars against Napoleon, which he would publish thirty years later<sup>39</sup>. He could therefore have identified only the Spanish-speaking “faction that sees and acts” as that sect of the Sublime Perfect Masters “who were the latest reincarnation of the Jacobin and egalitarian Freemasonry of Buonarroti”<sup>40</sup>.

In Turin in July 1820 the doctor Michele Gastone —a native of Mondovì and one of the most active leaders of the democratic conspiracy in northern Italy— had issued to the “churches” of the sect spread throughout northern Italy an order to work to force the princes to proclaim the democratic constitution of Spain already established in Naples<sup>41</sup>. To put it briefly, “the

<sup>36</sup> Gentile (2016): 103-130.

<sup>37</sup> Passamonti (1926): 309.

<sup>38</sup> Gentile (2011): 160-161.

<sup>39</sup> Balbo (1847).

<sup>40</sup> Spini (1950): 39.

<sup>41</sup> Spini (1950): 39-40.

Spanish myth and admiration for the constitution of Cadiz, as a banner of the democratic revolution, were therefore having a considerable effect in the sectarian and revolutionary circles of Piedmont and northern Italy<sup>42</sup>. These were extremisms that in Turin could not fail to challenge both those who had joined (or, like Charles Albert, sympathised with) the much more moderate Society of Federals (which far from Buonarroti's Communist ideals focused on the struggle against despotism, on achieving the independence of Italy and on obtaining a constitution), as well as those who expressed various liberal-moderate positions, aristocratic and innately legalistic which aspired to a sincere collaboration with the monarchy for the introduction of a *Charte octroyé*<sup>43</sup>.

Prospero Balbo was well informed about the whole scene. Thus, while the foreign minister San Marzano, from the congress of Lubiana, became increasingly convinced of the need to contain Piedmontese reformism so as to remove the prospect of the Holy Alliance taking the disastrous decision to intervene militarily (as it was preparing to do with regard to Naples), the minister of the interior, between January and February had gone ahead, calculating that he might persuade the sovereign to concede a constitution in order to avoid the tragedy of a revolution. This was an individual and preventive initiative which disregarded the anti-constitutional direction of the sovereign and his council. In collaboration with his son, Prospero Balbo began to study the English, French, Spanish and Sicilian models. He knew that the French constitution was supported only by nobles; that the English one (especially in the Sicilian version) had supporters among the moderate constitutionalists; that the Spanish one, then the most promoted in Italy partly for nationalist and anti-Austrian reasons, was the least suitable for the Savoy court due to its "assembly" nature<sup>44</sup>. His personal preference, therefore, was for the Sicilian charter of 1812, which had the twofold advantage of being Italian and of having been approved by the English<sup>45</sup>. But for the moment the studies remained locked in a drawer.

#### IV. CARDS ON THE TABLE: THE FACE OF THE REVOLUTIONARIES

The political situation within the Kingdom of Sardinia had worsened by the end of February, when on the 28<sup>th</sup>, at Pont-de-Beauvoisin, on the

<sup>42</sup> Spini (1950): 40.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*: 38-39; Talamo (2000): 466-468.

<sup>44</sup> Pene Vidari (2015): 561.

<sup>45</sup> Romagnani (1990): 492.

Savoy-French border, a carriage belonging to Prince Emanuele Dal Pozzo della Cisterna, a subject of Savoy, was stopped by the police. Inside the vehicle, in which the wealthy Milanese merchant Francesco Chimelli was travelling, were found numerous letters by Dal Pozzo and other exiles (including the famous Luigi Angeloni) written to various members of the Piedmontese aristocracy linked to the liberal sectarian world<sup>46</sup>. The seized correspondence contained details of a plan for an insurrection that was to lead to the proclamation in Turin of a constitution based on the Spanish model. The letters also revealed the possible involvement of the Prince of Carignano, Charles Albert.

Equally compromised were some of the most prominent figures of the subalpine army and aristocracy: from the baron Ettore Perrone di San Martino, a former Napoleonic officer<sup>47</sup>, to the marquis Demetrio Turinetti di Priero<sup>48</sup>; from the count and artillery major Giacinto Provana di Collegno (affiliated to the Naples Carbonari in 1819<sup>49</sup>) to the colonel of the Queens Dragoons, Carlo Emanuele Asinari di San Marzano, son of the foreign minister of the Kingdom of Sardinia<sup>50</sup>, and up to the general and inspector of cavalry Alessandro De Rege di Giffenga<sup>51</sup>. The news reached Turin on 2 March, arousing immense concern (and embarrassment) in court and government circles. That evening the police detained Perrone, Turinetti and Asinari, then entered their homes and took away incriminating papers.

But it was clear that the most wanted man was the Prince of Cisterna, member of one of the richest families in Piedmont who had served Napoleon and Prince Camillo Borghese. He was acquainted with Benjamin Constant and had close contacts with French liberals and the *Comité directeur*, a close friend of Eugenio Bardají (the Spanish embassy was located in Palazzo Cisterna, his home, in central Turin)<sup>52</sup>. He was arrested on the evening of 4 March on the Savoy border, and from there taken to the fort of Fenestrelle. Notwithstanding these high-ranking arrests, the situation was already beyond control: while Prospero Balbo and his son Cesare did everything they could to protect the liberals and to persuade them to abstain from causing unrest and thereby provoking foreign intervention, the minister San Marzano, formerly a lukewarm reformer and father of one of the top accused, at the congress of Lubiana

<sup>46</sup> Cavicchioli (2017): 399-411.

<sup>47</sup> Marsengo and Parlato (1986): 156-157; Bianchi (2015).

<sup>48</sup> Marsengo and Parlato (1986): 259.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*: 175-176; Ratti (1982).

<sup>50</sup> Marsengo and Parlato (1982): 26.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*: 170.

<sup>52</sup> Romagnani (1990): 529.

gave his full backing for the Austrian intervention in Naples and urged Vittorio Emanuele I not to give in to the demands of the liberals to avoid the retaliation of the reactionaries<sup>53</sup>.

For his part the king, on 5 March, commissioned Alessandro Saluzzo, minister of war and former guardian of the Prince of Carignano during the years of the empire, to sound out how real was the devotion of Charles Albert to the monarchical cause. Charles Albert had already secretly met Giuseppe Pecchio, an authoritative Lombard member of the Società dei Federati<sup>54</sup>. Thus came the evening of 6 March, when the aforementioned Carlo di San Marzano and Giacinto di Collegno, together with Roberto d'Azeglio<sup>55</sup>, the count Filippo Annibale Santorre Derossi di Santarosa (major in the army general staff and director of the secretariat of war and navy<sup>56</sup>), count Guglielmo Moffa di Lisio (captain in the King's Cavalry<sup>57</sup>) made their way secretly to Palazzo Carignano to meet with Charles Albert.

After the revolution, the prince himself revealed what took place at that meeting: "they told me that they belonged to societies that had long worked for the independence of Italy; that all the plans were close to being completed; that I had always shown great attachment to my country, that I could have no other end than glory, and that they hoped that I would stand alongside them to obtain from the king a slight concession that would be but the beginning of future glory"<sup>58</sup>. To this day the Prince of Carignano's response to these approaches remains a mystery: Charles Albert claimed to have tried to get the conspirators to abandon their revolutionary intentions, while Santarosa claimed that, on the contrary, he had obtained the prince's support for the rebellion.

What is certain is that Charles Albert did not report the conspirators, but instead merely spoke about them to the war minister, Saluzzo, who, in turn, passed on the information to Prospero Balbo and to the minister of police, Lodi, who did not lift a finger<sup>59</sup>. Thus in that conspiratorial atmosphere, the first day of Lent, 7 March, arrived. As the historian Omodeo has written, the Prince of Carignano, in possession of "the grave secret," arranged for the king to leave Turin and then, exerting influence on the conspirators,

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<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*: 530-531.

<sup>54</sup> Talamo (1977).

<sup>55</sup> Nada (1965): 97.

<sup>56</sup> Marsengo and Parlato (1982): 172; De Francesco (2017).

<sup>57</sup> Marsengo and Parlato (1982): 112-113; Crociani (2015).

<sup>58</sup> Fiorini (1900): 11.

<sup>59</sup> Romagnani (1990): 534.

delayed the uprising: he wanted to “place himself in the position of mediator and virtual arbitrator between the two parties”<sup>60</sup>. In fact, having convinced the sovereign not to leave for Genoa but to move to the Castle of Moncalieri, in the Turinese hills, that evening Charles Albert had another meeting with San Marzano and Collegno and declared his unpreparedness to make any “pronouncement”. He had heard from Cesare Balbo and General Giffenga that the army was not ready for a war against Austria<sup>61</sup>.

The two did not take this well: by behaving this way the prince would be disgraced in the eyes of Europe<sup>62</sup>. But Charles Albert, apparently thinking he had them under control, went on his way, and on 8 March conferred with Saluzzo: the minister could go to Moncalieri to reassure the king because the planned insurrection had failed. But the conspirators thought differently. They had in the meantime been joined by another member of the nobility: Carlo Vittorio Morozzo di Magliano e San Michele, colonel of the cavalry troops of Piedmont<sup>63</sup>. And on the day of the insurrection, the 10<sup>th</sup>, they returned to Charles Albert and asserted that the uprising would go ahead, without telling him when it would break out.

## V. CENTRE AND PERIPHERY: THE INSURRECTION IN ALESSANDRIA AND TURIN

In all this toing and froing, the constitutional question first surfaced at court on 9 March, when Prospero Balbo went to Moncalieri and took the opportunity to consult with the queen, Maria Teresa of Habsburg-Este. Their discussion centred around the Spanish constitution. Shortly before the queen had lent Countess Balbo, with a request that she show it to her husband, the widely read treatise, *Sulla costituzione di Spagna*, by the Swiss ultra-reactionary Karl Ludwig von Haller<sup>64</sup>. It was in fact a recent translation by the Turin publisher Pomba<sup>65</sup>. In his work the jurist lambasted the Gaditan charter, and recommended the most rigorous form of absolute monarchy as the model of government. Prospero Balbo read the book, but while he shared the author’s negative judgment on the Spanish constitution, in general he did not agree

<sup>60</sup> Omodeo (1955): 188.

<sup>61</sup> Comandini (1900-01): 1.116.

<sup>62</sup> Romagnani (1990): 535-536.

<sup>63</sup> Marsengo and Parlato (1986): 120.

<sup>64</sup> Portmann-Tinguely (2007).

<sup>65</sup> Haller (1821).

with its contents. Instead he suggested another writing to the queen: the treatise *Vues politiques sur les changemens à faire à la constitution de l'Espagne à la fin de la consolider spécialement dans le royaume de Deux-Siciles* (1820)<sup>66</sup>, in which the author, the French jurist Jean-Denis Lanjuinais<sup>67</sup>, suggested an entire series of modifications to the Spanish charter that would render it more like the French *Charte octroyée*. In this way the gains made by the Neapolitan revolution would be saved, and an intervention by the Holy Alliance averted<sup>68</sup>.

But it was no longer the time for theoretical ruminations. The conspirators were ready to act. Charles Albert managed once more to speak to Santarosa, informing him that he had taken the necessary precautions to safeguard the king. Santarosa repeated that the conspiracy was aimed at Austria and that Vittorio Emanuele I had nothing to fear. But he could understand the prince's qualms and therefore undertook to give counter-orders to the provincial garrisons at Alessandria, Fossano and Vercelli, which had been put on full alert. It was too late. Colonel San Michele, from Fossano, was already ready to march on Moncalieri at the head of his regiment. And late in the evening of 9 March at Alessandria Lieut-Colonel Guglielmo Ansaldi of the Savoia brigade<sup>69</sup>, Captain Isidoro Palma di Borgofranco of the Genova brigade<sup>70</sup>, Captain Luigi Baroni<sup>71</sup> and Lieutenant Angelo Bianco di Saint-Jorioz both of the King's Dragoons<sup>72</sup>, together with a group of notables including the doctor Urbano Rattazzi<sup>73</sup>, the lawyer Fortunato Luzzi<sup>74</sup>, and the businessman Giovanni Appiani<sup>75</sup> made the decision to rise up under the motto "Italy, king and constitution"<sup>76</sup>.

The rebellion was about to be mounted not in the capital, but in the main military garrison of the kingdom: in the shadow of the citadel not far from the border with the Lombardy-Veneto Kingdom. Charles Albert, along with the minister of war and the governor of the capital, had a lot to do, going around the barracks to "remind officers and soldiers of their duties to the

<sup>66</sup> Lanjuinais (1820).

<sup>67</sup> Durelle-Marc (2009).

<sup>68</sup> Romagnani (1990): 536-537.

<sup>69</sup> Marsengo and Parlato (1982): 16.

<sup>70</sup> Marsengo and Parlato (1986): 140.

<sup>71</sup> Marsengo and Parlato (1982): 42.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*: 64.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*: 183.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*: 86.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*:19.

<sup>76</sup> Comandini (1900-1901): 1117.

king”. But on the same evening, at Alessandria, Lieut-Colonel Ansaldi took the keys of the citadel from the captain who held them by arresting the fortress commander, and the morning after, 10 March 1821, Captain Palma with the insurgent Genoa cavalry regiment stationed in Alexandria called for the constitution of Spain. With the tricolour raised, a governing junta was immediately formed for the proclamation of the King of Sardinia as king of Italy and the adoption of the Gaditan charter<sup>77</sup>.

The Spanish constitution “thus made its public entrance in Piedmont following the military uprising of the Alessandria fortress: for a little less than a month [it would be] at the centre of subalpine political life”<sup>78</sup>. This precipitated events in Turin. During the hours in which the “provisional provincial junta of the Government of the Kingdom of Italy” at Alessandria decided to suppress the existing civic administration to appoint another composed of pro-French moderates who had taken part in the municipal government between 1802 and 1814<sup>79</sup>, Prospero Balbo and Charles Albert crossed paths in the king’s antechamber in Moncalieri: the prince had just ended his audience with the king, in which he exhorted him to grant the constitution, not of Spain, but rather that of Sicily<sup>80</sup>.

Given the worsening situation, Vittorio Emanuele I returned to Turin in the evening. His council was in a permanent sitting in order to take measures about the bad news arriving from the province: not only had Carlo San Marzano moved to Vercelli in the hope of raising the local military garrison, but Santarosa and Lisio, who left Pinerolo at the head of three hundred cavalrymen and headed for Alexandria, signed and published in Carmagnola a declaration which stated that the Piedmontese army could not abandon its king to the influence of Austria. Thus, by rebelling, they were heeding the needs of the country, vowing to defend the sovereign and the honour of the crown from all enemies. After the governor of Alessandria fled, Santarosa entered the city and assumed control of the army and the national guard.

The king’s council was unable to come up with no other solution than to address the troops through a manifesto: the Prince of Carignano gave “undoubted proof of his constant zeal”; it was wrong to say that Austria had asked to occupy fortresses and to demobilise part of the army; independence was secure so long as the authorities did not perceive a threat against the monarchy; the king’s pardon was guaranteed to those who returned

<sup>77</sup> Comandini (1900-01): 1117; Livraghi (2012): 63-68.

<sup>78</sup> Pene Vidari (2015): 564.

<sup>79</sup> Livraghi (2012): 66-67.

<sup>80</sup> Romagnani (1990): 540.

immediately to barracks. The manifesto had little effect. On the morning of 11 March, Captain Vittorio Ferrero<sup>81</sup>, at the head of eighty soldiers from the Royal Light Legion, travelled from Carignano to Turin and stood in front of the church of the borough of San Salvario. Having unfurled the Carbonara flag of red, light blue and black, he hailed the onlookers with the cry of “Long live the king! Long live the constitution!” before then distributing a proclamation praising Vittorio Emanuele I, the Prince of Carignano and the constitution of Spain. The Guard and Royal Piedmont regiments were sent to confront the revolutionaries. Although Colonel Raimondi, who wanted to restore Ferrero to reason, was wounded by a gunshot from a student, no serious action was taken. After having spoken in vain for seven hours to ask the king for the constitution and a declaration of war against Austria, the Ferrero column was allowed to leave undisturbed for Chieri and Asti by crossing the bridge of boats on the Po in front of the castle of Valentino.

## VI. EVERYTHING EXCEPT THE SPANISH CONSTITUTION: A SOLUTION IMPOSSIBLE TO FIND

Apart from this episode, which marked the beginning of the revolution in the capital, Sunday 11 March, Prospero Balbo recalled, was the one and only day on which the constitution was spoken about in the Palazzo Reale.

I had always thought it very bad to let any type of concession be torn from us out of fear, and even worse to allow any constitution to be imposed. And I felt this strongly, at least as much as my colleagues did. But seeing violence begin in one field, and fear in the other, and also seeing all the possibility of extremes ill and above all fearing the Spanish constitution, I thought, among all the choices to take the one, albeit improbable, that there was some hope of accepting instead another constitution since all were better than that one. If I had been forced to choose, I would have been in favour of the Sicilian constitution, which conformed to the English one, but written in Italian and already guaranteed by England to Sicily, as in fact the English minister had recently spoken about in parliament. For this reason this morning I gave Mangiardi [an official in the ministry] that constitution telling him to highlight its key points for His Majesty’s benefit<sup>82</sup>.

<sup>81</sup> Marsengo and Parlato (1986): 14.

<sup>82</sup> Passamonti (1927): 326.



It was on the afternoon of 11 March that Prospero Balbo instructed his first secretarial officer, Melchiorre Mangiardi, to formulate a Piedmontese version of the Sicilian constitution, preparing a draft adaptation of the preamble and a draft proclamation to the subjects, in the hope that the provision would curtail the increasingly insistent demand for the Gaditan charter. Even in those hours, Queen Maria Teresa had forcefully opposed the constitution of Spain:

Quant à cette infâme constitution espagnole, je suis d'avis que quand même, en la refusant, le Roi serait assassiné dans son fauteuil, moi avec lui et vous tous avec nous, je persisterai à dire qu'il ne faut pas l'accorder. Ce n'est pas que j'ignore [...] que selon les lois d'Espagne la couronne passerait à mes filles, mais une couronne qui ne leur appartiendrait pas légitimement, une couronne déshonorée ne me tente pour elles<sup>83</sup>.

Thus not even the clear advantage of overturning the Salic law that would have ensured the passage of the crown to King Vittorio Emanuele I's firstborn (Maria Beatrice, wife of Duke Francesco IV of Modena) rather than to Charles Albert (who, while of Savoy, belonged to the secondary Carignano branch), made the Gaditan constitution more palatable for the queen. The single-chamber parliament (expression of popular sovereignty), the limitation of sovereign prerogatives, as well as the preference accorded to the charter by the secret societies, were elements too revolutionary for the Sardinian sovereigns. As such, the fallback solution was that formulated by Mangiardi on Balbo's orders, the principal articles of which foresaw the institution of a two-chamber parliament with legislative power, executive power and power of placet and veto for the sovereign over parliamentary legislation, judicial autonomy, the promise of a new code, and tolerance of religious minorities<sup>84</sup>.

Balbo had carried on with the work, but nothing had yet been deliberated. On the evening of 11 March there was yet another private council, that in which the queen disparaged the Spanish constitution. According to her, the king should never have to "concede" a constitution but, if anything, to "accept one". Balbo was not of the same opinion: the verb "accept" made the person of the king subordinate to popular will. In any event, it was in that moment of grave indecision that Balbo proposed the concession of a constitution on the English model. Vittorio Emanuele I gave his assent, inviting the interior minister to produce a draft of the preamble.

<sup>83</sup> Zucchi (1927): 478.

<sup>84</sup> Benedetto (1951): 73-75.

But there was considerable constitutional confusion in the council: only the governor Revel knew that the English constitution was “not written, that is, not compiled all in a body”. Thus the question of the best solution was once again debated. Balbo advanced the proposal of granting the Sicilian charter, whereas Vittorio Emanuele I relaunched the idea of the ancient constitution of the island of Sardinia, which called for periodic meetings of three “*stamenti*” (on the model of the States General). The council, however, had doubts about a solution considered “too gothic”, even though Balbo maintained it could be viable if brought up to date, since the constitution “had the great advantage of not being either new or foreign or dictated by others, but already known and observed by the king in an important part of his states”<sup>85</sup>. But he could not convince his colleagues, and so the council returned to the idea of a constitution on the English model, with two amendments relating to the state religion, which would remain Catholic, and the succession to the throne, which would continue to be based on the Salic law.

It was at that very time, when Vittorio Emanuele I was about to sign the edict, that the *coup de théâtre* happened: San Marzano had returned from Lubiana and asked for an immediate audience. There was total silence as he related what he had heard at the congress of the Holy Alliance: the substance was that the powers would not tolerate revolutions or constitutions of any sort in Italy, and the Austrians already had dozens of battalions on a war footing. This news was enough to prompt the shelving of plans for a constitution since the priority was now that of stifling internal rebellions to avert foreign invasion. But that intention was overtaken by events. While on the morning of 12 March a new proclamation was published by the king placing responsibility on the insurgents for any intervention by the Holy Alliance, which would never have recognised the constitutional movement, the citadel of Turin mutinied. Three canon shots rang out from the fort at one in the afternoon. The three hundred soldiers barricaded within had pronounced themselves in favour of revolution. Commander Des Geneys, who had opposed them, was killed. The Carbonara flag (red, light blue and black), was raised above the ramparts.

Charles Albert was sent to parley with the rebels, who shouted in his face “war against Austria and Spanish constitution!”. And on his way back, he was surrounded by excited crowds shouting “long live the constitution!” The cavalry charged the throng, mortally wounding a woman<sup>86</sup>. The municipal council of Turin then decided to ask the king for the Gaditan constitution,

<sup>85</sup> Passamonti (1927): 331.

<sup>86</sup> Comandini (1900-1901): 1118.

“thereby giving the official coverage of an institutional body to a claim that hitherto had been expressed only by military rebels to the existing absolutist order”<sup>87</sup>.

It was too much. At midnight Victor Emmanuel I abdicated: in the absence of the heir —his brother Charles Felix was en route to Modena— he irrevocably renounced the Crown, appointing his “beloved cousin” Charles Albert as regent of the states. In those hours, two conspirators belonging to the Società dei Federati presented themselves at Palazzo Carignano to ask the prince for the proclamation of the constitution of Spain. The outgoing Balbo, before taking his leave, dispensed lapidary advice: “Three things I recommend above all: do not accept that constitution; try at all costs to retake the citadel of Turin; then that of Alessandria”<sup>88</sup>.

## VII. EPILOGUE: A STILLBORN CONSTITUTION

When it came, 13 March was a chaotic day. With Victor Emmanuel I and his family having left under escort for Nice, the Kingdom of Sardinia became a powder keg. In Ivrea the magistrate Alerino Palma di Cesnola, the principal local exponent of the Società dei Federati, led the revolt that resulted in the proclamation of the Gaditan charter, on the same day publishing an appeal entitled *Friends of the Spanish Constitution*.<sup>89</sup> Other insurrections broke out in Asti, Casale Monferrato and Vercelli. In Turin, the colonel of the Aosta brigade came out of the barracks shouting “Spanish Constitution!”

At that point the twenty-two-year-old Charles Albert had no choice left. After having played for time with a proclamation calling for public peace and order, and now under siege from the crowd and under pressure from the Turin council, he agreed to promulgate the Spanish constitution. On the evening of that fateful day he sent out another manifesto in which, submitting to the will of the new sovereign, Charles Felix, to whom the throne was devolved, and waiting to learn of his intentions as to any change of the fundamental laws of the kingdom, he acted as interpreter of the people who had loudly declared their preference for “a Constitution in keeping with the one in force in Spain”.

In essence, the Gaditan charter would be promulgated and observed as the law of the state only after those “modifications, which the national

<sup>87</sup> Pene Vidari (2015): 566.

<sup>88</sup> Passamonti (1927): 347.

<sup>89</sup> Marsengo and Parlato (1986): 140-141.

Representation, as one with Your Majesty, [would] deliberate”<sup>90</sup>. Enthusiasm was sky high. In Turin 20,000 copies of the Spanish constitution translated into Italian and accepted by Charles Albert were quickly distributed<sup>91</sup>. On the 14<sup>th</sup> after appointing new ministers and, in the temporary absence of a parliament, a provisional junta to represent the people, on 15 March 1821, at 8pm, Charles Albert swore loyalty to the constitution of Spain:

Io Carlo Alberto di Savoia, reggente del regno, investito d’ogni autorità al momento dell’abdicazione di Sua Maestà il Re Vittorio Emanuele, giusta la dichiarazione nostra dei tredici del corrente mese giuro a Dio, e sopra i Sacrosanti Evangeli di osservare la Costituzione Politica Spagnuola sotto le due seguenti modificazioni essenziali, ed inerenti alla condizione di questo regno, analoghe al voto generale della nazione, ed accettate fin d’ora dalla Giunta Provvisoria cioè: Primo. Che l’ordine della successione al Trono rimarrà quel egli si trova stabilito dalle antiche Leggi, e consuetudini di questo Regno, e dai pubblici trattati. Secondo. Che osserverò, e farò osservare la Religione Cattolica, Apostolica, Romana, che è quella dello Stato, non escludendo però quell’esercizio di altri culti che fu permesso in sino ad ora; e di più sotto quelle altre modificazioni, che verranno dal Parlamento Nazionale d’accordo con Sua Maestà il Re ulteriormente determinate. Giuro altresì di essere fedele al Re Carlo Felice, così Iddio mi aiuti<sup>92</sup>.

The constitution of Spain thus became a reality in the Savoy monarchy, with only two changes harking back to tradition as well as others to be determined by the king and the parliament in the future. Thus on 16 march the royal printers officially published the text, including the variations. Charles Felix, still in Modena, was informed of the grave decision taken by the regent in a letter delivered by the squire Sylvain Costa de Beauregard. Disgusted, he tore up the letter and threw it in the messenger’s face. He immediately dictated a manifesto for publication in the states of the kingdom, giving notice that he had first to verify the abdication of his brother and that he was far from allowing any change in the form of the pre-existing government, and that he declared “null and void any act of sovereign competence” not signed by Vittorio Emanuele I or himself<sup>93</sup>. For Charles Albert he had only a verbal message, given to Costa de Beauregard: “dites-lui que s’il lui reste dans les

<sup>90</sup> Zucchi (1927): 489.

<sup>91</sup> Comandini (1900-01): 1118.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*: 1119.

<sup>93</sup> Pene Vidari (2015): 574.

veines une goutte de notre sang royal, il doit partir pour Novare et y attendre mes ordres”<sup>94</sup>. The Spanish constitution was dead even before it was born.

The regent tried to gain time by issuing another proclamation on the 18<sup>th</sup>, in which he stated that he was working to “enlighten His Majesty [...] about the desires of his people”, given that “His Majesty [was not] fully informed of the situation of things in his Royal Domains: a natural thing in his absence”<sup>95</sup>. To no avail. Charles Felix had already written to General Bubna, governor of Lombardy-Veneto, requesting him to mobilise the Austrian troops on the border of the Ticino river, and to the loyal governor of Novara, General Vittorio Amedeo Sallier de La Tour, whom he asked to keep the troops in his fortified city under control, so that all the militias that remained loyal to the absolute monarchy could converge on the city.

There was no more room for manoeuvre. So, after having appointed the recognised leader of the insurrectional movement, Santorre di Santarosa, minister of war, on the evening of 21 March Charles Albert left the capital as Charles Felix had commanded. He had wanted to place himself at the head of the loyalist troops in order to regain the trust of the king, to act as an intermediary between the monarchy and the rebels, and to appear as the saviour of the country in the face of Austrian prevarication. But he was not given this chance: instead he had to give up the regency, and on 29 March Charles Felix ordered him to leave the kingdom and travel to the court of his father-in-law, Ferdinand III of Habsburg-Lorraine, in Florence. Thereafter, in the power vacuum, the provisional junta under the presidency of Canon Marentini and the government headed by Santarosa remained the revolution’s sole authorities. They kept the Gaditan constitution as an emblem, despite not being able to act according to the principles it embodied. The charter, moreover, had been applauded on 22 March in Genoa, when the city rebelled by forming a municipal constitutional council.

But it was now the endgame. Determined to fight to the end, on 7 April the few remaining rebel ranks arrived under the walls of Novara. The next day the loyalist troops began to bombard the constitutionalists, while the Austrians, having crossed the Ticino, began to pursue them. In disarray, the rebels took the road to Liguria. Santarosa, before fleeing, prepared a large number of passports, and the governor of Genoa, Des Geneys, fearing the gathering of the revolutionaries but the arrival of the Austrians even more, withdrew enough money from the finance management’s cash desk to hire nineteen ships, allowing hundreds of the fugitives to embark and set sail for

<sup>94</sup> Costa de Baeuregard (1880): 132.

<sup>95</sup> Comandini (1900-01): 1122.

Marseille. Having arrived in that port, the wealthiest made their way to Paris, while the poorer majority asked to continue to Barcelona in the hope of enlisting in the Spanish constitutional army<sup>96</sup>.

Many would re-encounter Charles Albert on the battlefields of 1823, but the prince would no longer be on their side. Having left together with the Hundred Thousand Sons of Saint Louis commanded by the Duke of Angoulême, Charles Albert became the hero of the assault on the Trocadero and thus reacquired political respectability in the eyes of the European powers. Once the torchbearer of the constitutionalists, the Prince of Carignano ended up being the champion of the Restoration. This volte-face inspired the poet and patriot Giovanni Berchet to write the romantic poem *Clarina*: “Esecrato, o Carignano, va il tuo nome in ogni gente! Non v’è clima sì lontano ove il tedio, lo squallor, la bestemmia d’un fuggente non ti annunzi traditor”<sup>97</sup>. The prince, and later king (from 1831), would go on to write four memorials to dispel the counter-myth attached to him<sup>98</sup>.

## VIII. CONCLUSIONS

Despite the fact that the Piedmont revolution of 1821 lasted only about a month, it rightly takes its place as a fundamental chapter of the nineteenth-century history of the Kingdom of Sardinia, and, in a broader perspective, of the history of the Risorgimento. The event already has an important historiographic tradition behind it, albeit one that has yet to answer many questions. If nothing else, it has been crystallised in the collective imaginary in different, not to say opposite ways: on the one hand as a coup d’état carried out hastily and inexpertly, and on the other hand as the first tangible result of the world of secret societies ramified throughout Europe, the first uprising that would eventually upset the balance of the Holy Alliance. There remains the fact of the over 3,800 people involved; but, as Giuseppe Parlato has observed, it is still difficult today to “establish what the real character of the insurrection was”. There are those who denigrated the uprisings, “belittling them as an impossible dream of winning power by some young and somewhat spoiled nobles,” and those that who have fit them into the framework of oleography “representing these uprisings as the first certain and conscious sign of the next, unstoppable national revival”. The conclusion —Parlato continues— is that both these positions have

<sup>96</sup> Nada (1993): 156-160.

<sup>97</sup> Berchet (1830): 41.

<sup>98</sup> Marsengo and Parlato (1982): \*19-\*20.

over time given the uprisings a local dimension, turning them “into a phenomenon of exclusive or preponderant Piedmontese interest”<sup>99</sup>.

Of course, there is a local element, if only because of the different nature of the uprisings that broke out in the provinces or in the capital: from Alessandria, where the touch-paper was lit, a garrison border city that had entered the Savoy orbit only at the beginning of the eighteenth century and was characterised by the presence, besides the military, of a very strong property-owning, intellectual bourgeoisie intent on obtaining more political power for itself within the state<sup>100</sup>; to Genoa, where the uprising had a strong municipal downturn, partly because of the city’s poorly digested annexation to the Kingdom of Sardinia<sup>101</sup>; to Turin, where, while asking for a constitution, the officials did not question their loyalty to the monarchy, and where a young generation of nobles grown up under the Napoleonic administration railed against the harsh restoration carried out by the Savoy.

The constitution had then become a banner beneath which opposing factions stood: from the moderates, oriented towards a French or English solution, to the democrats, determined advocates of the Spanish one. But the Piedmontese uprising as a whole demonstrates how deep-seated, bitter and irresolvable was the constitutional confrontation. On one side was the king’s council, where many had no knowledge of the various constitutions (apart from the Gaditan charter, considered an absolute evil), and on the other the revolutionary sects, for which the Spanish constitution, little understood despite the publicity effort of ambassador Bardají, and which, following the shock wave of the events in Spain and Naples in particular, was reduced to more of a slogan than a genuine creed. As Pene Vidari has noted, the transplanting of the Constitution of Cadiz - in its Neapolitan variant with the few modifications added by Carlo Alberto - into the Savoy system of the period proved impossible for three different reasons:

Firstly, it set its mythicised concept of a romantic-national “break” at not only the local or Italian but also continental level against the legitimist system of government of post-Napoleonic Europe, to which the Savoy government was aligned. Secondly, therefore, the harsh reaction of the “concert” of the great powers of the time developed, in which the intransigence of Austria and Russia in Lubiana gained them the green light not only of Prussia but also of France and England. Thirdly, there was the objection of the principal branch of the House of Savoy

<sup>99</sup> Marsengo and Parlato: \*207.

<sup>100</sup> Livraghi (2012): 63-73.

<sup>101</sup> Gentile (2015): 313-330.

against a constitutional regime, especially a Gaditan one, towards which the main political and military force of the Piedmontese Masonic, Carbonari and sectarian contingent had directed its constitutional demands, overriding the efforts of some young members of the Piedmontese nobility - and initially Santorre di Santa Rosa himself - to obtain a different constitutional solution, generally based on the English one and mostly mediated through the Sicilian one<sup>102</sup>.

The Piedmontese uprisings of 1821 were therefore a failure, which resulted in the unleashing of exacerbated absolutist politics and police activity. It was, however, also a European turning point, the demonstration —together with the revolts in Spain, Portugal and the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies— that the restored governments could no longer survive without Austria's intervention. And there was more. The insurrections, even if the masses steered clear of taking part, did not give rise to the creation of royalist movements; that being so, absolute governments could no longer hope for the fanatical support of the populace, as they had done in 1799. Finally, while the gunpowder had been supplied by the military, there had then been broad support by the middle classes: “who had thus offered indisputable evidence of their aversion to the restored governments”<sup>103</sup>.

The Piedmontese authority would have done everything, at the time of the judgment, to understate the participation of the bourgeois classes, thus avoiding giving political and ideological publicity to the insurrection. The objective was to promote the idea of an all-military mutiny, like the revolt that had broken out in Spain the previous year, in order to make the European powers, and in particular Austria, believe that it had been merely a gesture by a few exalted young people, without no real outcome, who, for glory and prestige, had played at sparking off a revolution<sup>104</sup>. However, the reality of the facts would have given the lie to this pretence: the exile of those involved (consciously favoured by the authorities, due to the many noble families compromised by the generational clash between fathers and children) accelerated the process of the Risorgimento. Many would go on to take part in the insurrections of Spain, Portugal, Belgium and Greece, not a few meeting their deaths (to name but one: Santarosa at the Battle of Sphacteria<sup>105</sup>), fuelling the solidarity of the nationalist movements<sup>106</sup>.

<sup>102</sup> Pene Vidari (2015): 580-581.

<sup>103</sup> Nada (1993): 160.

<sup>104</sup> Marsengo and Parlato (1982): 48-57.

<sup>105</sup> Ambroggio (2007).

<sup>106</sup> Bistarelli (2011); Isabella (2011); Brice and Aprile (2013); Diaz *et al.* (2015); Pulvirenti (2017); De Fort (2015): 65-81.



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