

Benjamin Franklin's 'The Way to Wealth' in Italy, between the *Ancien Régime* and Revolution (1775-1801)

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1. Introduction. Franklin as a symbol of the American Revolution in 18th-century Italy

In Italy, as much as in the rest of 18th-century Europe, Benjamin Franklin undoubtedly represented one of the symbols of the American Revolution from the very beginning. Franklin was not only an undisputed protagonist of the political events that led to the independence of the colonies, but ultimately came to be regarded as a genuine embodiment of the American Revolution and its values¹. Even before the revolutionary events, Franklin had already acquired considerable fame in Italy in the scientific and academic fields. As Franco Venturi reports in the third volume of *Settecento riformatore*, in September 1772 the «Gazzetta di Milano» recorded the admission into the Royal Academy of Sciences in Paris «of the new foreign associate, Mr Tranklin [sic] of Philadelphia»². The outbreak of the conflict between Britain and its colonies naturally led to a shift in perspective, greatly

increasing Franklin's fame and politicising his profile. Just over two years later, on 6 December 1774, in the pages of the Florentine gazette «Notizie del mondo» he was presented as the leading figure behind the demands that the colonies were addressing to the British parliament³. In January 1775, the «Gazzetta universale o sieno notizie storiche, politiche, di scienze, arti agricoltura», also published in Florence, presented Franklin as an «agent of the colonies» who demanded «to be heard by the English Parliament»⁴. Two years later, in January 1777, the «Gazzetta universale» described «the famous» Franklin as one of the founding fathers of the American Revolution⁵.

In reality, in the 1770s and 1780s Franklin continued to be quoted, read, and even translated in Italy mainly as a scientist. However, there was no lack of references to Franklin as the father of American liberty. In the fourth of the five Odes entitled *America Libera*, written in 1784, Vittorio Alfieri referred to Frank-

lin as the «father, counsel, soul, and mind of the new-born liberty»⁶. In *Saggio d'un filosofo politico amico dell'uomo*, published in Naples in 1775, the abbot Onofrio Tata-ranni of Matera pointed to Franklin as the «chief protector of American liberty»⁷. Particularly significant from this perspective is the Friulian priest Pietro Antoniutti's introduction to his translation of Franklin's *Opere politiche*, published in Padua in 1783⁸. In the «Notice by the Italian Translator», Antoniutti pointed out that «Dr. Franklin's political and philosophical writings» would always arouse «the admiration of the English and Americans, as well as of foreigners and remote posterity, since they contain a truthful picture of the provinces now called independent,» thereby providing «a basis for modern politicians, and anyone who may keep a historical record of memorable predictions which have been fully fulfilled»⁹.

The French Revolution helped make Franklin a symbol of the American Revolution, and the myth of Franklin that intensified in France after his death was also echoed in the old Italian states¹⁰. One example is the *Nuovo dizionario istorico*, published in Naples in 1791. Here we find one of the most comprehensive descriptions in Italian of the role played by Franklin in the events leading up to the birth of the United States¹¹. In the long entry on Franklin by the editors of the Italian translation, his contribution to science was mentioned, but the focus was on the political aspects. Franklin, «one of the most celebrated men of our century», had given «a new kind of tone to politics». The detailed description of the events leading to the independence of the American colonies emphasised the crucial role he had played – from his

speeches in the British Parliament to the Declaration of Independence¹².

The republican experiences of the Revolutionary Triennium (1796-1799) did not bring about any significant acceleration in this perspective. The political culture of 1797-1799 showed affinities with the American Revolution (we need only consider that two exponents of Italian patriotism such as Giuseppe Compagnoni and Carlo Botta went on to write histories of America and the American Revolution)¹³. On the whole, however, publications from this period made limited reference to the American Revolution as a model to follow, or as an experience to reflect upon in building the new political institutions. Consequently, limited reference was also made to Franklin and the American Revolution. One exception is to be found in the *Discorso storico-politico* presented by Giuseppe Lattanzi at the essay competition announced by the Central Administration of Lombardy in September 1796 on the topic «Which of the free governments best suits the happiness of Italy». Lattanzi defined Franklin as «the founding hero of the American republic», «a driving force for his fellow citizens, who [...] with such constancy, unity, and valour finally became free and independent in 1783». Lattanzi identified a direct link between the American Revolution, the French Revolution, and the Revolution in the Italian territories. Like a «new Prometheus», Franklin had brought the fire of revolution from America (where after centuries the «original liberty of men» had «resurfaced») to the «Seine». This fire had then spread to Italy, sparking «the sacred love of liberty and motherland»¹⁴. Interpretations conflicting with Lattanzi's were also



Benjamin Franklin's Reception at the Court of France 1778, print, 1860

put forward, however. For example, in *Catechismo in sei trattenimenti in forma di dialogo*, which once again presented Franklin as a symbol of the American Revolution, Francesco Astore firmly denied that the latter might serve as a model for revolutionary Italy. A resounding 'no' was given to the question of whether the «principles of liberty» had been passed «from English America» to France through «that Franklin who was said to have removed the thunderbolt from Jupiter and the sceptre from the tyrants». The French republic and its constitution were seen as the only true model of political liberty¹⁵.

A privileged and as yet unexplored avenue for further reflection on the circula-

tion of the Franklin myth as an emblem of the American Revolution in the Italian context is represented by Italian translations of *The Way to Wealth*. This popular pamphlet, an 18th-century bestseller, played a central role in the dissemination of the American myth as a model of moral, political, and economic regeneration. Its popularity crucially contributed to making Franklin the very symbol – in some ways the personification – of the American Revolution. The first Italian translation of the pamphlet was published in 1775, when the uprising in the colonies had already broken out, and Franklin was known not only as a scientist but also for his political role in the revolutionary events.

Franklin's pamphlet was the «moral and political catechism of New England»¹⁶; translating, publishing, and reading it thus meant dealing with the political conflict between the mother country and its colonies, but also with the new model of American liberty¹⁷. This essay focuses on the political dimension of the Italian translations of *The Way to Wealth*. Its aim is not only to trace a history of the circulation of the text and study its reception in Italy, but also to interpret these translations as a more complex workshop of ideas. Translators, publishers, and printers made certain changes to Franklin's work with the aim of influencing its reception, as well as of meeting the expectations of the Italian public and making the text better reflect the ideals they sought to promote. Initially, the Italian editions of the work provided an opportunity to reflect on the events that had led to the birth of the United States, following the link that had progressively been established between Franklin and the American Republic. The French Revolution contributed to a greater politicisation of the pamphlet, without, however, clearly affecting the Italian reception of *Poor Richard's Almanack*. With the start of the Revolutionary Triennium (1796-1799) and the overthrow of the *Ancien Régime* in Italy, translations of the pamphlet took on a different political significance. They brought into focus the social and political project underlying *The Way to Wealth*, which was interpreted and represented as a model of civic virtue, centred on the values of moderation and industriousness, to be placed at the basis of the new democratic-republican societies.

2. *Translations of The Way to Wealth in Ancien Régime Italy. The revolt of the American colonies*

The success of *The Way to Wealth*, a symbol of the transatlantic political revolution, quickly spread from America to Europe¹⁸. Sixty French editions were published in the 18th century alone¹⁹. After French, Italian became the language into which the pamphlet was most widely translated, with fifteen editions. The first Italian translation appeared in 1775 as part of *Scelta di opuscoli interessanti tradotti da varie lingue*, published by Giuseppe Marelli through his printing press in Milan²⁰. This popular periodical series ran from 1775 to 1777. The year before, in 1774, Marelli himself had published a selection of Franklin's letters and pamphlets, *Scelta di lettere e di opuscoli del signor Beniamino Franklin tradotti dall'inglese*²¹. The translator was the Milanese Carlo Giuseppe Campi, a friend and collaborator of the scientist Gian Francesco Fromond, who had put him in contact with Franklin. In a letter dated 24 July 1774, Campi wrote to Franklin, sending him four copies of the translation and asking him to inform him whether the new collection of his works, which Campi had heard was about to be published in England, contained any writings not found in the earlier ones, since he burned «with the desire to translate some other philosophical pieces of yours into Italian» («d'envie de traduire en italien quelques autres morceaux philosophiques de vôtre façon»). Campi added: «The usefulness, novelty, and clarity shine too brightly in your writings for me not to be charmed by them, and to see to it that the whole world might enjoy them» «l'utilité, la nouveauté,

la clarté brillent trop dans vos ecrits pour que je ne puisse en être charmé, et faire en sort de mon coté, que tout Le Monde en jouisse»²².

Although the frontispiece stated that the letters and pamphlets had been translated from English, Campi had actually based his translation on Jacques Barbeu-Dubourg's *Œuvres*, published in Paris in two volumes in 1773²³. Indeed, in the introductory pages of his translation, Campi even included part of Dubourg's introduction, stating that he had left out all the writings on electricity from the Italian edition because they were already well known in Italy. In reality, only a few letters and pamphlets were translated compared to those included in the two weighty volumes published in Paris (combined, the two volumes comprised almost 700 pages, the *Scelta di lettere e di opuscoli del signor Beniamino Franklin* less than 100); among the many texts omitted was *The Way to Wealth*.

However, it was not long before the text was translated into Italian: it appeared as early as the following year in *Scelta di opuscoli interessanti tradotti da varie lingue*. In all likelihood, the translator was Campi. The translation was again made from Dubourg's edition, which featured the first French translation of *The Way to Wealth* – a rather literal translation of an abridged version of the English pamphlet²⁴. The Italian translation faithfully reproduced the French one, starting from the title: *La maniera di farsi ricco chiaramente dimostrata nella Prefazione di un vecchio almanacco di Pensilvania, intitolato = Il Povero Riccardo fatto benestante (*) del Signor Beniamino Franklin*. The asterisk referred to the «Translator's Note» on the first page of the Italian edition, which reproduced

– with some changes – a note inserted at the end of the pamphlet in Dubourg's translation²⁵. The note not only made it clear that Franklin was the author of the pamphlet but, more importantly, drew an explicit link between the pamphlet and the colonial revolt. The pamphlet «greatly contributed both to the generous resolution – taken shortly after its publication – by all the inhabitants of the Colonies not to bring in any goods of English manufacture until Parliament revoked the acts which displeased them, and also to the very revocation of the acts, which the unanimous and constant agreement of the Colonists has wrested from the Metropole, as it were»²⁶.

The few lines of this note actually provided the key to reading the entire pamphlet from a political perspective. The Italian publisher's choice to insert it on the first page – thereby departing from the French translation – is indeed revealing of his desire to emphasise this aspect. Not only was *The Way to Wealth* explicitly associated with the American Revolution, but it was also stated that the *Poor Richard's* precepts had greatly contributed to the protests in the colonies against the imposition of taxes to the exclusive benefit of Britain. It was precisely this political reading that gained prominence, as is clearly shown by the review of *Scelta di opuscoli interessanti* published as early as February 1775 in the Florentine weekly «*Novelle letterarie*». In the few lines devoted to *The Way to Wealth*, no reference was made to the contents of the pamphlet; instead, part of the note was quoted²⁷.

Another two editions of this translation were published in 1775. One was included in the Turin edition of *Scelta di opu-*

scoli interessanti tradotti da varie lingue, a periodical printed by Giammichele Briolo, the official printer of the Accademia delle Scienze in Turin, which reproduced the journal of the same name issued in Milan²⁸. The other was included in the second edition of *Scelta di opuscoli interessanti*, which was printed by Marelli in Milan and published a few months after the first edition, owing to its great commercial success. This second Milanese edition reproduced the first one in every respect, with the exception of a few additions in the translator's note²⁹. First of all, at the beginning it was stated that Franklin himself had delivered the pamphlet into the hands of the translator in order for it to be published, and that the pamphlet was not to be found in the earlier English collections of Franklin's writings³⁰. This addition suggests that Campi had indeed received the pamphlet from Franklin, following the request made in the aforementioned letter of July 1774. At the end of the note, a sentence was added that, in a way, brought the pamphlet up-to-date in relation to the conflict between Britain and its colonies: for it recalled «the firmness with which even at present the Colonies are opposing the new acts of Parliament», which was again interpreted as «a continuing effect of the impression produced by this pamphlet at the time»³¹. The translation published by the printer Marelli in Milan, which faithfully reproduced the first French translation by Barbeau-Dubourg, was republished numerous times over the course of the 18th century, becoming the most widely circulated Italian translation, at least until the mid-19th century. Curiously enough, Dubourg's translation of the pamphlet went almost unnoticed in

France, where it enjoyed limited circulation.

As early as 1776, the translation was published again in Venice, but without the place of publication or publisher, and without any introduction or other paratextual element. The only difference compared to the Marelli edition was the significant absence of the «Translator's Note»³². The Venetian edition, the first to be published as a self-standing pamphlet, was followed by the one published in Vicenza by the printer Francesco Vendramini Mosca in 1778, again as a separate pamphlet³³. In this re-edition, the title was slightly modified. In the aftermath of the Declaration of Independence Franklin was now qualified by the adjective «American» (*La maniera di farsi ricco chiaramente dimostrata nella Prefazione di un vecchio almanacco di Pensilvania, intitolato = Il Povero Riccardo fatto benestante del Signor Beniamino Franklin. Americano*)³⁴. In this case the «Translator's Note» was kept. There was also a «Printer's Notice», in which, however, no reference was made to the ongoing war between the colonies and the mother country. The printer thus showed that he did not wish to stress the pamphlet's political value. Rather, on the one hand, he emphasised the success of this text by a «learned man from Pennsylvania, already known to the Republic of Letters through many of his moral and scientific works». On the other hand, the printer noted that, in comparison to the translation contained in Marelli's expensive volume, the one published by him was addressed and accessible to «the most needy men» and «less cultured people»³⁵. Two years later, in 1780, another re-edition was published in Faenza (this time based on the second

edition published by Marelli in 1775), without any introductions/prefaces³⁶. These multiple editions in a cheap format, published between 1776 and 1780 and addressed to a broader readership than that of the first editions, allowed for a wide dissemination of the ideas behind *The Way to Wealth*. The social classes that represented the target readership for these Italian translations were therefore closer to those for whom Franklin had begun to compose *Poor Richard's Almanack* in 1732.

The two subsequent editions instead sprung from a different, more politically marked context. The first edition was the translation included in the aforementioned translation of Franklin's *Opere politiche* by Pietro Antoniutti, which came out in 1783³⁷. It was a new translation. This version was more concise than the Milanese one, but the abridgements did not alter the meaning and ideas of the pamphlet, which Antoniutti had classified as one of Franklin's works on «general politics». As already noted above, in the introduction to the volume Antoniutti had referred to Franklin's crucial political role in the events leading to the birth of the American Republic, allowing the reader to frame the message of *The Way to Wealth* according to this perspective. Franklin was not described as a revolutionary, however, but as someone driven by «a spirit of peace and conciliation» which had led him to seek to unite «the interests of the mother country and the Colonies in a common bond of vigour and public happiness, and to prevent all measures tending to alienate the two countries from each other». It was «the despotic spirit of England», a «rich, lofty, warlike, and commercial nation», that had sparked the conflict³⁸.

Another politicised edition was published by Vincenzo Antoine in Bergamo in 1787. Antoine was a printer of French origin who had moved to Bergamo in 1777 after spending many years in Brescia and who was connected to Masonic circles³⁹. Antoine's intended readership, however, was different – and broader – than that of Antoniutti's much more expensive bound volume. In the introduction addressed «To the Reader», Franklin was described as a «famous American [who] will represent an interesting epoch in history» and whose «vicissitudes are a matter of public curiosity today»⁴⁰. Famous first and foremost in America, but also in France and throughout Europe for his scientific research, only in Britain had he failed to garner appreciation. Antoine gave his own explanation of the origin of the text. The British had seen Franklin as one of the leading figures in the colonies' revolt against the mother country, and it was in order to exonerate himself that he had published *The Way to Wealth*, «by which it is proved that the decadence of the American Colonies is due not to the burden of the taxes imposed by England, but rather to the luxury and vice of those Provinces»⁴¹. In reality, Antoine continued, the pamphlet had ultimately been interpreted in the opposite way to the author's intentions, by presenting it as one of the main driving factors behind the uprising in the colonies. As proof of this reading, the translator's note in the Marelli edition (which Antoine wrongly attributed to the Italian translator) was reproduced in full. Antoine hastened to point out that this interpretation was incorrect in his opinion⁴². Franklin was not an insurgent, and the ideas of *The Way to Wealth* did not lead to rebellion.

Nevertheless, albeit cautiously (probably for reasons of political prudence), Antoine eventually not only emphasised the connection between Franklin and the events overseas, but ended up presenting the American Revolution as a positive example. Besides, the printer – who a decade later, at the beginning of the revolutionary phase in Italy, would adopt an openly democratic stance – already gave proof of his ideas and political culture in this publication by including as an epigraph a passage from Rousseau's *Contrat social* criticising excessive inequality in wealth⁴³. In any case, in their introductions both Antoniutti and Antoine – who were operating in a society where the *Ancien Régime* institutions still appeared to be firmly in place – portrayed Franklin both as a symbol of the American Revolution and as a non-agitator, a non-revolutionary. Franklin was a moderate man, a man of dialogue, a conciliator; the Revolution had not been an effect of his actions and ideas, but rather of Britain's misguided policies towards its colonies.

The next edition, published in Milan in 1794 without the printer's name, featured the translation published by Marelli in 1775 without any changes. In the meantime, the onset of the French Revolution had contributed to the renewed centrality of Franklin's pamphlet in France and also to a change in its reception⁴⁴. In revolutionary France, *The Way to Wealth* was seen not only as a symbol of the American Revolution, but as useful reading material for all good patriots. In the article titled *Sur Franklin et sur la Science du bonhomme Richard*, published in the pages of «Patriote française» in October 1791, Franklin was described as the man who had «estab-

lished freedom in America»: his pamphlet was to be read both by the «people» and by «educated people» in order to learn about the republican virtues⁴⁵.

In those years when French revolutionary ideas were already beginning to permeate Italy, yet power still lay firmly in the hands of absolute rulers fighting against the French, the space for political readings of *The Way to Wealth* became much narrower. In this context, a new edition was published in Milan, in 1794, which scrupulously avoided any reference to the American Revolution. In the notice «To Readers» the individual economic dimension was presented for the first time as the main focus of the text: «this pamphlet is worth more than a hundred thousand folio volumes, and is capable of ensuring the well-being of numerous families and vast provinces»⁴⁶. The notice continued with an Enlightenment reflection on the topic of happiness, which could be achieved through a judicious balance between desires and the means to satisfy them. Franklin provided maxims about «home economics» that were useful to increase wealth, thus helping to ensure the kind of happiness that comes from satisfying one's needs. Wealth, however, allowed easier access not only to happiness, but also to virtue. Wealth and individual well-being, the fruits of labour, were the very goal of well-regulated societies⁴⁷. In such a way, the printer showed that he had grasped the economic and ethical message of Franklin's pamphlet. The norms for virtuous economic behaviour proposed by Franklin were not confined to the individual level, but carried social value. *The Way to Wealth* presented an economic ethic framed within the coordinates of com-

mercial society, which ultimately formed the basis of public prosperity and the harmony and well-being of society.

3. The good man Richard in revolutionary times (1796-1801)

The arrival of French armies in the Italian territories in 1796, the overthrow of the *Ancien Régime* institutions, and the emergence of democratic-republican polities – the Venetian Municipality (1797), the Cispadane Republic (1796-1797), the Cisalpine Republic (1797-1799-1801), the Municipality of Turin (1797-1798), the Roman Republic (1798-1799), and the Neapolitan Republic (1799) – created a different context for the publication and reception of Italian translations of *The Way to Wealth*.

In 1797, a new and different translation of *The Way to Wealth* was published in Turin by the bookseller-publisher Francesco Prato under the title *Mezzo facile di pagare le imposizioni ossia La scienza di Riccardo Saunders*⁴⁸. This was a translation of the French edition published in 1777 under the title *La Science du Bonhomme Richard, ou moyen facile de payer les impôts*, which had been issued as a self-standing edition for the first time and had soon made the pamphlet a best seller in France⁴⁹. The French translator was Antoine-François Quétant, whereas the Italian translator's name is unknown. This was the first time an Italian translation had been made from the French version, which in turn was based on the original unabridged version of *The Way to Wealth*. Compared to Quétant's French edition, which already featured a different title from the 1773

translation, destined to enjoy considerable popularity (*La Science du Bonhomme Richard*), in the Italian edition the title and subtitle were inverted and the issue of taxation was brought to the fore⁵⁰. This was a deliberate choice made by the printer, Prato, who indeed centred his entire «Publisher's Notice» on the subject of taxes. He wrote: «Everywhere, both in public and in private, all that people talk about now is taxes and the cost of food-stuffs, without anyone being able to propose and suggest the most appropriate and opportune means by which, cooperating for the public good, it might become easier to pay them and bear them with the least burden»⁵¹. Hence the decision to publish the writings by the «celebrated Benjamin Franklin», who with «admirable simplicity has collected the most excellent lessons in private economics that are useful and necessary for every class of people in order to manage their affairs well»⁵². Prato also grasped the economic significance of Franklin's text: individual economic ethics was interpreted in terms of public virtue; by putting into practice «the precepts which the American Philosopher has strewn across these sheets», each individual could contribute to the well-being of society, «repairing the damage and healing the wounds of the beautiful country [viz. Italy]»⁵³.

When this translation came out, Piedmont was still under the control of Victor Amadeus III of Savoy (it was not until December 1798 that the first Republican Municipality of Turin was established). It is unsurprising, therefore, that there are no explicit references to revolutionary ideas and events, which instead punctuate the translation that came out in the same year

in Venice during the months of the Democratic Municipality. The references to the new political context were already clear from the title given to the translation: *Il Buon uomo Ricciardo e la costituzione di Pennsylvania italianizzati per uso della democratica veneta ristaurazione*⁵⁴. This translation too was made from Quétant's 1777 French edition. The title itself was taken from that French translation, where «Richard» was referred to for the first time as a «good man» – serving, for all intents and purposes, as an exemplary model – whereas in all other Italian editions published up until then the name «Riccardo» was accompanied by the adjective «povero» (poor). Again in keeping with the translation published in Paris in 1777, Franklin's pamphlet was followed by a translation of the Pennsylvania Constitution produced by the Venetian lawyer Antonio Marcantonio. This Venetian edition was the first to feature an Italian translation of the Pennsylvania Constitution, in which Franklin's notes also appeared, including the famous «Note d'un Americain». The plan to translate into Italian *Recueil des loix constitutives des états unis* (published in Paris in 1778), promoted by Franklin himself, had fallen through. Franklin had given the constitutional texts to Luigi Castiglioni, in order that he might forward them to the printer Manini of Cremona, but the latter had then failed to publish them, perhaps for fear of censorship⁵⁵.

The translator of *The Way to Wealth* and promoter of this publishing project was Bernardo Maria Calura of Murano, an experienced poet and translator, especially from German and English⁵⁶. With the fall of the Republic of Venice and the start of the republican-democratic experiment,

Calura immediately expressed his enthusiastic support of revolutionary ideas. In 1797 he printed a short collection of poems praising Bonaparte, Venice liberated, and freedom, along with a pamphlet entitled *Alla veneta nazionale guardia* (To the Venetian National Guard), extolling the new liberty and democratic Municipality⁵⁷. The translation opened with an introduction by Calura addressed «To the sovereign people of Venice», in which a number of themes present in *Veneta nazionale guardia* were repropounded and summarised. «Excellent mores and excellent legislation» wrote Calura «are the two solid foundations on which public happiness rests»⁵⁸. On one level, the «proverbs by the good man Richard» represented the best teaching to start the fundamental process of regeneration of morality and mores, which the «suspicious policy of an inquisitorial government» had reduced to «abominable depravity» in the past. «Sober pleasures», «moderation», and the «love of hard work and economy» were the «beneficial social virtues» that lay at the basis of the new societies of democratic-egalitarian inspiration⁵⁹. The model conduct exemplified by the good man Richard was a cornerstone of political freedom and of a more egalitarian society, where average wealth acquired through work and economy stood in contrast to the «odious distinction between the authoritative and wealthy nobleman and the oppressed plebeian»⁶⁰. Hence, the exaltation of mediocrity – understood precisely as an intermediate level of life, identified as a new social virtue – came to permeate the revolutionary literature of the Triennium⁶¹. On the legislative level, the reference was instead the Constitution of Pennsylvania, which was identified

as «the original model of the legislative code adopted by the wise French Republic». The Americans had been the first to experiment with a new and modern model of political freedom and popular sovereignty, which stood in opposition to the «tumultuous democracies of Greece, always highly fickle in their moods»⁶².

The next edition came out in Rome in 1798, at the height of the democratic experiment of the Roman Republic, under the title of *La maniera di farsi ricco chiaramente dimostrata nella prefazione di un vecchio almanacco di Transilvania intitolato "Il povero Riccardo fatto benestante"*. The editors regarded *The Way to Wealth* as providing an important ethical and moral model. The *Poor Richard's* maxims outlined a model of civic virtue, partly based on economic values, that was fundamental for the struggle against the *Ancien Régime* and the construction of the new democratic-republican polities. The translation was published with no mention of the publisher, but the printer was Vincenzo Poggioli. His printing press was the headquarters of the «Monitore di Roma», a newspaper directed by Urbano Lampredi that served as the organ of the most progressive democratic circles⁶³. This publishing project probably originated precisely in the milieu of the «Monitore di Roma», as the publication was anticipated in the pages of the newspaper by a notice included in the issue of 12 August 1798. It announced «a new edition of the famous work by the renowned Franklin entitled *The Way to Wealth*» accompanied by «some very interesting notes in which new methods will be proposed, confirmed by experiments carried out on a large scale, and which have proven successful so far»⁶⁴. The pamphlet

was ideally addressed to a middle class eager to «acquire comfort and riches» through work – a class envisaged as the very backbone of the republican edifice⁶⁵.

Contrary to what had been announced in the pages of the «Monitore», the translation was not actually enriched by any notes. It was simply another re-edition of the first translation published by Marelli in 1775, with no changes or additions, except for a brief notice «To the Reader». Its author showed limited knowledge of the publishing history of Franklin's work, insofar as he stated that the pamphlet had been published in Europe about three years earlier. The notice stressed the importance of the author, the «celebrated Benjamin Franklin, an illustrious American, great philosopher, and man of great wit and insight». The reference to the American events took the form of a full quotation of the translator's note in Marelli's edition, where the reflections on taxation in *The Way to Wealth* were interpreted as one of the causes that had driven the colonists to rebel against the mother country⁶⁶. The focus, however, was on a different level, which placed Franklin's text within the framework of the Italian revolutionary experience. The pamphlet was presented as a genuine «treatise on economics», superior to Xenophon's *Oeconomicus*, since it was not addressed to the few landowners, but to those who through their own work and «especially through the reforming of mores» would be able to accumulate enough capital over time to acquire some properties and eventually increase them. This was connected to the crucial question of the regeneration of the new man, republican man. As this regeneration was based on the reforming

of mores and morals, primarily through the promotion of temperance and sobriety (as opposed to excess and ostentation), a crucial role was attributed to work and activeness (as opposed to idleness). Industriousness was acknowledged to be a fundamental virtue of the new republican man: it was understood above all as love of one's country and commitment to the common good, within a more egalitarian context marked by the affirmation of a new middle class. In this perspective, the figure of the good man Richard, but later also of Franklin himself, came to represent an ideal model of behaviour, hinging on the qualities of moderation, frugality, and industriousness.

The same reading of Franklin's pamphlet can be found in the translation that was published in Bologna in 1801, in the context of the Second Cisalpine Republic (1800-1802). This translation may be regarded as the last one produced in the political and cultural context of the Triennium⁶⁷. The edition in question was a new translation by Giovanni Fantoni, a poet and ardent patriot, one of the leading figures in Italian democratism⁶⁸. This was not Fantoni's first experience as a translator: at the end of the 1780s he had translated Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther* from French, although his translation remained unpublished; then in 1795, following his full adherence to the transalpine revolutionary ideas, his Italian translation of Marie-Joseph Chénier's *Hymne à l'Être suprême* was published. Fantoni had already shown some interest in the figure of Franklin. In his *Poesie a Palmiro Cidonio* of 1778, he had evoked Franklin as «the Pennsylvanian» capable of shaking off «the yoke» of «tyrants», thereby

becoming a new «triumphant Brutus»⁶⁹. Fantoni had also composed an *Ode per ritorno dall'Europa in Filadelfia di Beniamino Franklin dopo la pace del 1783*⁷⁰.

In this case, the translator was also responsible for the publication of the text, within the framework of a specific cultural-political project. The translation came out under the title of *La strada di far fortuna o la scienza del buon uomo Riccardo*⁷¹. Here too, as in the Venetian translation of 1797, «the poor Richard» had been replaced by «the good man Richard». This rather loose translation, most likely based on a French edition, not only featured a more modern language, but also adapted the text to the Bolognese context (by setting it in Piazza delle Erbe, in Bologna)⁷². The main means by which this updating and contextualisation of the text was achieved, however, was the introduction addressed to «the people of Bologna». The first part was devoted to Franklin, defined as «one of the founders of Liberty in North America», and his *Way to Wealth*, «a most interesting pamphlet, on account both of the simple and valuable maxims which it contains and of the aim which he has set himself, namely to highlight what advantages may be obtained by everyone by means of industry and frugality»⁷³. Unlike the editors of the Roman edition of 1798, Fantoni proved to be well acquainted with the text and its publishing history. He recalled that Franklin had started publishing almanacs as early as 1732, and that in 1759 he had then collected «all the maxims scattered in the almanacs published over the course of twenty-five years into a discourse he entitled *The Way to Wealth*»⁷⁴. Fantoni once again associated the pamphlet with the American Revolution, but the reference

was no longer to the fact that it had made the colonists eager to rebel against the excessive taxes imposed by the mother country. The focus was on a different aspect. The dissemination of the pamphlet in America had enabled the circulation of a new ideal of living, centred on industry and frugality, creating the moral basis for the Revolution. Precisely on this level, *The Way to Wealth* also served as a model for revolutionary Italy. By reading the pamphlet, the people of Bologna too would be able to accomplish that moral and ethical regeneration necessary to support and defend their newly found political liberty.

In passing from one side of the Atlantic to the other, from America to Italy, through the important cultural mediation of French translations, *The Way to Wealth* ended up acquiring various different meanings. Through the tools at their disposal, such as introductions and notes, translators, editors, and printers became authors and provided different readings of the text in accordance with the different political-cultural contexts of its publication and reception. The first Italian translations published under the *Ancien*

Régime served as a stimulus for reflection on the American Revolution, contributing to making Franklin its symbol. The fall of the *Ancien Régime* marked a watershed. With the revolutionary break and the start of the Triennium, the pamphlet began to be regarded as a tool for the education of the people, bringing it somewhat closer to the significance of its initial publication in the American context. The good man Richard embodied revolutionary values and his precepts constituted a kind of manual of good conduct centred on the values of moderation and industriousness. Republican citizens were expected to draw inspiration from it in order to contribute to the good of their country. In short, *The Way to Wealth* became a model for revolutionary Italy. But once the revolutionary republican experiences were over, the picture changed⁷⁵. It was only with the beginning of the Risorgimento, and the establishment of economic knowledge as one of the bases of the project of Italian political independence and national unity, that a stream of fresh translations were issued and the text became newly politicised⁷⁶.

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² F. Venturi, *Settecento riformatore*, vol. III, *La prima crisi dell'antico regime (1768-1776)*, Torino, Einaudi, 1979, p. 421.

³ «Notizie del mondo», 6 December 1774.

⁴ «Gazzetta Universale o sieno notizie storiche, politiche, di scienze, arti agricoltura», 18 February 1775.

⁵ «Gazzetta Universale o sieno notizie storiche, politiche, di scienze, arti agricoltura», 7 January, 1777.

⁶ V. Alfieri, *L'America libera, Ode IV*, Asti, Company' tipi di Baskerville, 1784, p. 27.

⁷ O. Tataranni, *Saggio d'un filosofo politico amico dell'uomo ...*, Na-

- poli, Giuseppe di Bisogno, 1785, p. 313.
- ⁸ B. Franklin, *Opere politiche di Beniamino Franklin*, L. L. D. F. R. S. Nuovamente raccolte e dall'originale inglese recate nella lingua italiana, Padova, s.e., 1783.
- ⁹ «Avvertimento del Traduttore Italiano», in *Opere politiche di Beniamino Franklin* cit., p. 5.
- ¹⁰ On the veneration of Franklin in France, see J. A. Leith, *Le Culte de Franklin en France avant et pendant la révolution française*, in «Annales Historiques de la Révolution Française», n. 48, 1976, pp. 543-571.
- ¹¹ Nuovo dizionario storico, ovvero, *Istoria in compendio di tutti gli uomini, che si sono renduti celebri per talenti, virtù, sceleratezze, errori...*, Napoli, Michele Morelli, 1791, vol. XI. The Italian translation was based on the seventh French edition of Chaudon's work, which was published in 1789 and did not include the «Franklin» entry, which would only be added with the 1805 edition.
- ¹² Nuovo dizionario storico, ovvero, *Istoria in compendio di tutti gli uomini* cit., pp. 374-379.
- ¹³ R.R. Palmer, *The Age of the Democratic Revolution. A Political History of Europe and America, 1760-1800*, Updated Edition Foreword by David R. Armitage, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2014 [first edition 1959], pp. 594-595.
- ¹⁴ G. Lattanzi, *Discorso storico-politico sul quesito progettato dall'amministrazione generale della Lombardia*, Venezia, Gaetano Motta, 1797, pp. 26-27.
- ¹⁵ F. Astore, *Catechismo repubblicano in sei tratti a forma di dialoghi*, Napoli, Carlo Pisciotta, 1799.
- ¹⁶ «Franklin», in *Continuazione al Nuovo dizionario storico degli uomini che si sono renduti più celebri per talenti, virtù, scelleratezze, errori, ec...*, vol. IV, Napoli, Gioacchino Maria Olivier-Poli, 1824, p. 181.
- ¹⁷ Some remarks on Italian translations of Franklin's pamphlet can also be found in A. Pace, *Benjamin Franklin and Italy*, Philadelphia, American Philosophical Society, 1958, and L. Rava, *La fortuna di Beniamino Franklin in Italia*, Firenze, s.e., 1922.
- ¹⁸ W. Pencak, *Politics and Ideology in 'Poor Richard's Almanack'*, in «The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography», n. 116, 1992, pp. 183-211.
- ¹⁹ M. Barber Stowell, *Early American Almanacs: the Colonial Weekday Bible*, New York, Burt Franklin, 1977, p. 85; H.-J. Lüsebrink, *Transferts culturels transatlantiques et circulation des savoirs dans les cultures populaires. Le cas des almanachs de Benjamin Franklin*, in «Tangence», n. 72, 2003, pp. 27-40.
- ²⁰ *Scelta di opuscoli interessanti tradotti da varie lingue*, Milano, Giuseppe Galeazzi, 1775.
- ²¹ *Scelta di lettere e di opuscoli del signor Beniamino Franklin tradotti dall'inglese*, Milano, Giuseppe Marelli, 1774.
- ²² To Benjamin Franklin from Carlo Giuseppe Campi, 24 July 1774, in William B. Willcox (ed.), *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 21, January 1, 1774, through March 22, 1775, New Haven, London, Yale University Press, 1978, pp. 250-251.
- ²³ *Oeuvres de Benjamin Franklin...*, Traduites de l'Anglois sur la quatrième édition par M. Barbeau Dubourg, Paris, Quillau l'aîné, 1773. Concerning this translation, see A. O. Aldridge, *Franklin and His French Contemporaries*, New York, New York University Press, 1957, pp. 38-44.
- ²⁴ B. Franklin, *Le Moyen de s'enrichir, enseigné clairement dans la Préface d'un vieil Almanach de Pensylvanie*, intitulé: le pauvre Henri à son aise, in *Oeuvres de Benjamin Franklin* cit., vol. II, pp. 171-181.
- ²⁵ B. Franklin, *Le Moyen de s'enrichir, enseigné clairement dans la Préface d'un vieil Almanach de Pensylvanie*, intitulé: le pauvre Henri à son aise, Paris, Ruault, 1777, p. 181.
- ²⁶ B. Franklin, *La maniera di farsi ricco chiaramente dimostrata nella Prefazione di un vecchio almanacco di Pensilvania*, intitolato = Il Povero Riccardo fatto benestante (*) del Signor Beniamino Franklin, in *Scelta di opuscoli interessanti tradotti da varie lingue* cit., pp. 81-82.
- ²⁷ «Novelle letterarie», 17 February 1775.
- ²⁸ *Scelta di opuscoli interessanti tradotti da varie lingue*, Torino, Giammichele Briolo, 1775, vol. 1.
- ²⁹ *La maniera di farsi ricco chiaramente dimostrata nella Prefazione di un vecchio almanacco di Pensilvania*, intitolato = Il Povero Riccardo fatto benestante (*) del Signor Beniamino Franklin, in *Scelta di opuscoli interessanti tradotti da varie lingue*, vol. 1, edizione seconda, Milano, Giuseppe Marelli, 1775, pp. 83-84.
- ³⁰ *La maniera di farsi ricco chiaramente dimostrata nella Prefazione di un vecchio almanacco di Pensilvania* (1775, second Marelli edition), p. 83.
- ³¹ Ivi, pp. 83-84.
- ³² B. Franklin, *Il povero Riccardo ovvero la maniera di farsi ricco, Operetta del Sig. Beniamino Franklin utilissima ad ogni sorte di persone, tradotta dall'inglese, [Venezia], s.e., 1776*.
- ³³ B. Franklin, *Il povero Riccardo fatto benestante: del signor Beniamino Franklin Americano*, Vicenza, Francesco Vendramini Mosca, 1778.
- ³⁴ «The manner of making oneself rich clearly demonstrated in the Preface to an old Pennsylvania almanac, entitled = The Poor Richard Made Well by Mr. Benjamin Franklin. American».
- ³⁵ Franklin, *Il povero Riccardo fatto benestante* cit., pp. 5-6.
- ³⁶ B. Franklin, *La maniera di farsi ricco chiaramente dimostrata nella prefazione di un vecchio almanacco di Pensilvania* intitolato *Il povero Riccardo fatto benestante del sig. Beniamino Franklin tratta dal volume primo della scelta di opuscoli interessanti tradotti da varie lingue stampato per la se-*

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- ³⁷ Franklin, *La strada alle ricchezze*, in *Opere politiche di Beniamino Franklin* cit., pp. 23-26.
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- ³⁹ B. Franklin, *La Maniera di farsi ricco o sia il povero Riccardo fatto benestante almanacco per l'anno 1787 terzo dopo il bisestile*, Bergamo, Vincenzo Antoine, 1787.
- ⁴⁰ Ivi, pp. 3-4.
- ⁴¹ Ivi, p. 5.
- ⁴² Ivi, p. 8.
- ⁴³ On the printer Antoine and his activities during the revolutionary period, see Daniele Edigati, Simona Mori and Roberto Pertici (eds.), *La Repubblica bergamasca del 1797. Nuove prospettive di ricerca*, Roma, Viella, 2020.
- ⁴⁴ Aldridge, *Franklin and His French Contemporaries* cit., pp. 38-59.
- ⁴⁵ «Le patriote française», 10 October 1791.
- ⁴⁶ B. Franklin, *La maniera di farsi ricco del signor Beniamino Franklin*, Milano, 1794. The economic ethic of *The Way of Wealth* is the focus of S. A. Reinert, 'The Way to Wealth' around the World: Benjamin Franklin and the Globalization of American Capitalism, in «The American Historical Review», n. 120/1, 2015, pp. 61-97.
- ⁴⁷ Franklin, *La maniera di farsi ricco del signor Beniamino Franklin* (1794) cit., pp. 5-6.
- ⁴⁸ B. Franklin, *Mezzo facile di pagare le imposizioni ossia La scienza di Riccardo Saunders*, Torino, Francesco Prato, 1797.
- ⁴⁹ B. Franklin, *La Science du Bonhomme Richard, ou moyen facile de payer les impôts. Traduit de l'anglais*, Philadelphie Paris, Ruault, 1777.
- ⁵⁰ In the French title, the «poor» Richard was turned into a «good man». On this see, H. Kittel, *From Poor Richard to le Bonhomme Richard*, in M. Ballard, L. D'Hulst (eds.), *La Traduction en France à l'âge classique*, Lille, Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 1996, pp. 156-176.
- ⁵¹ Franklin, *Mezzo facile di pagare le imposizioni* cit.
- ⁵² *Ibidem*.
- ⁵³ *Ibidem*.
- ⁵⁴ B. Franklin, *Il Buon uomo Riccardo e la costituzione di Pensilvania italianizzati per uso della democratica veneta ristaurazione*, Venezia, s.e., 1797.
- ⁵⁵ The Constitution of Pennsylvania was published in France in *Affaires de l'Angleterre et de l'Amérique* in March 1777, and then the following year in *Recueil des loix constitutives des états unis (Recueil des loix constitutives des colonies angloises, confédérées sous la dénomination d'États-Unis de l'Amérique septentrionale...)*, Philadelphia [Paris], Cellot & Jombert, 1778.
- ⁵⁶ On Calura see N. Vianello, «Calura, Bernardino Maria», in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, Vol. 16, Roma, Dizionario della Enciclopedia, 1973, pp. 822-824.
- ⁵⁷ B.M. Calura, *Estri bellici*, Venezia, s.e., 1797; B.M. Calura, *Alla Veneta Nazionale Guardia*, Venezia, Stampato dal cittadino Palessese 1797.
- ⁵⁸ *Il Buon uomo Ricciardo e la costituzione di Pensilvania* cit., p. 3.
- ⁵⁹ *Ibidem*.
- ⁶⁰ *Ibidem*.
- ⁶¹ On the praising of the *mediocre condition* in revolutionary Italy, see C. Carnino, *Le «bon citoyen»*. *La représentation de la citoyenneté pendant le Triennio italien (1796-1799)*, in M. Albertone and D. Castiglione (eds.), *Les Métamorphoses de la représentation*, Paris, Classiques Garnier, 2018, pp. 287-311.
- ⁶² Franklin, *Il Buon uomo Ricciardo e la costituzione di Pensilvania* cit., p. 4.
- ⁶³ B. Franklin, *La maniera di farsi ricco chiaramente dimostrata nella prefazione di un vecchio almanacco di Transilvania intitolato «Il povero Riccardo fatto benestante»*, del Sig. Beniamino Franklin, Roma, Vincenzo Poggioli, 1798.
- ⁶⁴ «Monitore di Roma», 13 August 1798, p. 470.
- ⁶⁵ *Ibidem*.
- ⁶⁶ B. Franklin, *La maniera di farsi ricco chiaramente dimostrata nella prefazione di un vecchio almanacco di Transilvania*, Roma, s.e., 1798.
- ⁶⁷ In the same year, 1801, another Italian edition came out in Naples, which had returned under Bourbon rule. This volume was edited by Andrea Zucchini, an intellectual very close to court circles, and was dedicated to the anti-revolutionary and conservative Amerigo Antinori. In his preface Zucchini brought the content of *The Way to Wealth* down to the level of domestic economy, emptying it of all political significance (*Ricordi interessanti di economia privata* [Napoli], s.e., 1801).
- ⁶⁸ On Fantoni see L. Rossi, «Fantoni, Giovanni», in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, vol. 44, Roma, Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1994, pp. 678 ss.
- ⁶⁹ G. Fantoni, «A Palmiro Cidonio marchese Girolamo Pallavicini di Genova», in *Poesie di Giovanni Fantoni fra gli arcadi Labindo*, Italia, 1823, vol. III, pp. 31-38.
- ⁷⁰ Concerning Fantoni's reflection on revolutionary America, see also G. Spini, *Italia e America dal Settecento all'età dell'imperialismo*, Venezia, Marsilio, 1976, pp. 13-15.
- ⁷¹ Franklin, *La strada di far fortuna o la scienza del buon uomo Riccardo*, Bologna, Fratelli Masi, 1801.
- ⁷² Ivi, pp. 13-14.
- ⁷³ Ivi, pp. 3-4.
- ⁷⁴ *Ibidem*.
- ⁷⁵ The Napoleonic period witnessed a sharp drop in the number of Italian translations; between 1802 and 1815 only two editions were published: *La vera maniera di farsi ricco e gran fortuna. Almanacco economico-politico-morale per l'anno 1810*, Monza, Luca Corbetta, 1810; and *La maniera di farsi ricco di Beniamino Franklin*, Milano, Giovanni Silvestri, 1814.
- ⁷⁶ Pace, *Benjamin Franklin and Italy* cit., pp. 209 ss.