PARLIAMENTARY HISTORY

The Formidable Machine: Parliament as Seen by Italian Diplomats at the Court of St James's in the First Half of the 18th Century

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To the representatives of Italian states in London, early 18th-century Britain often remained a puzzle. The Revolution Settlement presented them with the problem of identifying the real source of power, both in order to send home reliable information and to try to secure support for the interests of their princes, who were sometimes desperate for the friendship, or at least the lack of hostility, of Great Britain. An analysis of the weekly despatches and of the final reports drafted by Italian diplomats (namely the representatives of the Savoyard state, the republics of Genoa and Venice, the Duchy of Modena and the Grand Duchy of Tuscany) in the first half of the 18th century offers evidence on their sources of information and on their vision of the political system of the country. Parliament loomed large in their correspondence. News on the activity of the Houses as well as forecasts on the challenge they posed to the ministry were a recurrent theme. To Italian diplomats, parliament was a source of instability. In their eyes, only the rise of a strong premier minister – of which Sir Robert Walpole was the epitome – could tame the fickle assembly in Westminster and bring order, though precariously, to the British polity.

Keywords: diplomatic correspondence; 18th-century Italian states; instability; constitution; premier minister; Sir Robert Walpole

1. *Context*

In the first half of the 18th century, a post in London was undoubtedly a place of high responsibility for a diplomat coming from one of the various Italian *ancien régime* states. Not only was Britain one of the superpowers of the time, events had also led to a greater involvement on the part of British forces, both in the Mediterranean and in central Europe, especially in the Wars of the Spanish (1701–14) and Austrian (1740–8) Successions. Such conflicts, and the peace treaties that brought an end to them, also had an impact on the balance of power between the states of the Italian peninsula. Most Italian states were on the receiving end of transformations in the political landscape of Europe, on which they had

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an extremely limited influence, and London was one of the places where decisions were made and news and diplomatic gossip circulated. On the other hand, that period saw the rise of the Savoyard state to a regional power, a rise in which the relations between the courts of Turin and London played a crucial role.[1] This implied both the need for the duke of Savoy (later king of Sicily and, eventually, of Sardinia) to keep British monarchs under constant watch and the necessity, for other Italian states, to keep an eye on the success of their troublesome neighbour. Other reasons for a constant diplomatic vigilance at the court of St James's were specific to certain Italian states. The republics of Genoa and Venice, with their long commercial tradition, were obviously interested in keeping relations with an international trading power such as Great Britain. Moreover, being Mediterranean maritime powers, albeit in decline, they had at times occasion to complain of the behaviour of British fleets and merchants; or, conversely, it was the turn of Whitehall to take offence with what was perceived as an excess of leniency on the part of Genoese and Venetian naval authorities towards French or Spanish ships. Likewise, the status of Leghorn and of its thriving community of English merchants was a recurrent issue in the correspondence of the agents of the Duchy of Tuscany.

Although the reasons were many for Italian states to have a reliable and efficient agent in London, a serious problem constantly emerges, namely the difficulty on the part of Italian diplomats of understanding a country and a political system utterly different from anything with which they were familiar. Most of them were baffled by the peculiarities of the Revolution Settlement, and the shock of the Glorious Revolution did not seem to subside with the passing of time, as if the removal of a king 40 years after the beheading of another had made an axiom clear: uneasy lies the head that wears St Edward's crown, and in Britain, chaos and revolution can always be a few steps away. The instability of the political system was connected with two interplaying factors: the centrality of parliament in the constitution, and the endless struggle of parties for the control of the Westminster assembly and consequently of the balance of power in the realm. The aim of this chapter is to discuss, in the light of diplomatic reporting, how the role of parliament was perceived by the agents of Italian states as well as to survey the sources of information on which they built their knowledge. Naturally, each agent sent to London with a tough job to undertake had his own sensibility, and the length of experience in his post or his rank in the diplomatic world could affect each vision. Still, the work on archival sources relating to five Italian states – the Kingdom of Sicily (later of Sardinia), the republics of Genoa and Venice, the Duchy of Modena and the Grand Duchy of Tuscany – in a time span that goes from the accession of Queen Anne in 1702 to Sir Robert Walpole's fall in 1742, has highlighted recurring patterns of behaviour.

2. *Parliament and Instability*

A prominent factor was the perception of Britain – or rather *England*, so scarce was the attention normally paid to Scotland or, even less, Ireland – as a country with an unusual

[1] Cf. Christopher Storrs, *War, Diplomacy and the Rise of Savoy, 1690–1720* (Cambridge, 2000), 122–70; Christopher Storrs, 'Savoyard Diplomacy in the Eighteenth Century (1684–1798)', in *Politics and Diplomacy in Early Modern Italy: The Structure of Diplomatic Practice, 1450–1800*, ed. Daniela Frigo (Cambridge, 2000), 210–53; Enrico Genta, *Princípi e regole internazionali tra forza e costume: Le relazioni anglo-sabaude nella prima metà del Settecento* (Napoli, 2004).

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constitution and a stormy, extremely unstable political life. Diplomats with a reduced experience of the English political way of life were naturally more exposed to feelings of confusion; this included ambassadors, whose stay in London was generally shorter than the many years spent by agents, secretaries and envoys. Even veterans, however, betrayed feelings of perplexity. Giuseppe Riva had been living in England since 1715 and acting in an official capacity as the envoy of the duke of Modena since the beginning of 1718, but when he left the country in 1729 and presented his final report to his master, the picture he painted of the British polity was rather unsettling:

> In the kingdom of England a monstrosity not deformed shows the Monarchy depending from the Aristocracy, a King who cannot make laws, a Parliament that can do everything while in existence, but that cannot exist unless the King wants it to exist, a Nation that does not accept laws or burdens, unless the Nation itself imposes them. There is sovereignty, but no real control.[2]

Riva's perception of Britain as a state unlike any regular form of commonwealth, and the language of his comments, echo Samuel Pufendorf's description of the Holy Roman Empire as 'an Irregular Body, and like some misshapen Monster, if it be measured by the common Rules of Politicks and Civil Prudence'.[3] This can perhaps help to explain why Riva's puzzlement was voiced in stronger terms than most of his colleagues were ready to use; still, it expresses a common concern.[4] Italian diplomats usually strove to understand the British constitutional and political system, sometimes alternating between puzzled fascination and desperate mistrust. Not only were they baffled by the interplay of a range of antagonistic political forces more complex than the ones they had been accustomed to in their native countries, but the constant alteration of the political landscape made their task more difficult. The king of Sicily, Victor Amadeus II, was at pains to repeat it to every new man he sent to London: Britain was 'a country subject to frequent mutations' and it was

[2]'[Nel] regno d'Inghilterra […] una mostruosità non deforme fa vedere la monarchia dipendente dall'aristocrazia, un monarca senz'autorità di far leggi, un parlamento, che tutto può unito e non può da sé unirsi, una nazione che non vuol ricevere leggi, né sopportar pesi, e se gli impone, le signorie senza dominio', BEUMo, manoscritti italiani [hereafter cited as MS it.] 678, f. 1v: 'Descrizione di Londra fatta l'anno 1729'. For the first two years of his stay, Riva had acted as secretary to the Modenese envoy, count Fabrizio Guicciardi, who died on 20 December 1717 NS and was immediately succeeded by his former aide, cf. Lowell Lindgren, 'Gioseffo Riva (1682–1739), a Diplomatic Arbiter of *Buon Gusto* in the London of George I', *Il Saggiatore musicale*, xxiii (2016), 280, 286–7. Guicciardi's death actually brought forward a substitution that had been planned since March, when the Modenese scholar Ludovico Antonio Muratori had written Riva that Duke Rinaldo of Este intended in due course to recall Guicciardi and leave Riva as the representative of the Duchy in London, BEUMo, Archivio Muratoriano [hereafter cited as AM], 48/23*bis*, f. 17v: Muratori to Riva, 24 Mar. 1717 NS; see Lindgren, 'Gioseffo Riva', 287, note 33.

[3]I am quoting from *The Present State of Germany: Written in Latin by the Learned Samuel Puffendorff, under the Name of Severinus de Monzabano Veronensis. Made English and Continued by Edmund Bohun* (1696), 152; the original Latin text reads thus: 'irregulare aliquod corpus, & monstro simile, siquidem ad regulas scientiæ civilis exigatur', Severini de Monzambano Veronensis [alias Samuel Pufendorf], *De Statu Imperii Germanici ad Lælium fratrem, dominum Trezolani, Liber Unus* (Genevæ [but actually The Hague], 1667), 157 [ch. VI, § 9].

[4]It must be mentioned, however, that while for Pufendorf the irregular, divided nature of the Empire was the main reason for its weakness ('Causa primaria mali est ex inconcinna, maleque digesta Reipubl. Compage': Pufendorf, *De Statu*, 176 [ch. VII, § 7]), one of the reasons of Riva's confusion was that, for all its oddness, the British constitution appeared somehow to be working. A 'constitutional deadlock' like the one Pufendorf had identified in Germany (Peter Schröder, 'The Constitution of the Holy Roman Empire after 1648: Samuel Pufendorf's Assessment in His Monzambano', *The Historical Journal*, 42 (1999), 967) did not seem imminent.

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necessary to be ready to react, if and when the wind changed.[5] In 1706, back in Venice after his embassy, Alvise Mocenigo stated to the duke and senators that it is always difficult to give a correct idea of any foreign government, but:

> giving a detailed view of England and of the British kingdoms must be most difficult and beyond belief, since the fickleness of the weather and of the nation, the different character and the inconsistency of personal conduct prevent a full understanding of the true principles and of the foundations that give existence and movement to that part of the world.[6]

Parliament, as the den of parties and factions, lay at the heart of this perception of instability and even danger.[7] This sensation was particularly strong at the beginning of the century and until the 1720s, but it did not disappear altogether when the ministry seemed to take a firmer control over parliament. The experience of William III, who in the eyes of some Italian envoys had ended up as a political hostage of parliament after having been greeted as a saviour in 1688–9, cemented the idea that the assembly in Westminster was the machine where real power was wielded and that everybody, the monarch included, had to come to terms with it.[8] Mocenigo, after having explained at some length the organisation of Queen Anne's court, the influence exerted on the queen by the lord high treasurer (Sidney Godolphin, Lord Godolphin) and by the duke and duchess of Marlborough, and the role of the privy council, underlined that any authority was 'circumscribed and affected by that of Parliament'.[9] That coming to terms with this reality was no easy task is exposed when the Venetian ambassador later underlined that the influence of the crown and the royal prerogative were, however, great; on the other hand, parliamentary control of the purse acted as a brake, meaning that supplies could be granted to the crown only under certain conditions. The resulting contradiction was made worse by the desire of great authority on

[5] 'Una nazione sottoposta a frequenti mutationi', ASTo, Corte, Materie politiche per rapporto all'estero, Negoziazioni (Gran Bretagna) [hereafter cited as C/MPE/N/GB], 4/1: Victor Amadeus II's instructions to marquis de Trivié, 1713; similar instructions were given to count della Perosa in 1716 and to marquis di Cortanze in 1719: ASTo, C/MPE/N/GB, 5/5–6. De Trivié remarked that circumstances changed so often in England that no less than 14 (former and present) secretaries of state were alive at the time, ASTo, C/MPE/N/GB, 4/2, f. 100: de Trivié's final report, c. 1717.

[6] 'Difficilissimo oltre ogni credere deve riuscire il fare un dettaglio dell'Inghilterra e de' regni britannici, dove l'instabilità del clima e della nazione, il temperamento diverso e l'irregolarità della condotta non lasciano ben comprendere li veri principii e li fondamenti che danno moto e sussistenza in quel tratto di mondo', Luigi Firpo, '*La relazione inedita di Alvise Mocenigo* sull'Inghilterra (1706)', *Atti dell'Accademia delle Scienze di Torino: Classe di Scienze Morali, Storiche e Filologiche*, xcix (1964–5), 489. In the same year, the Tuscan resident Iacopo Giraldi wrote that confusion and the violence of factions were the real character of the British government, ASFi, Mediceo del Principato [hereafter cited as MdP], 4234: Giraldi to Duke Cosimo III, 1 Jan. 1706 NS.

[7] At first, some reports wrote about *parliaments*, but the singular soon prevailed. Both upper and lower case were used.

[8] *Le relazioni degli stati europei lette al senato dagli ambasciatori veneti*, ed. Nicolò Barozzi and Guglielmo Berchet (4th ser., *Inghilterra,* Venice, 1863), 508–12: 1696 final report of the Venetian ambassadors Lorenzo Soranzo and Girolamo Venier. In 1699, the Genoese envoy extraordinary, Giovanni Antonio Giustiniani, had foretold that soon the monarchy would be just a shadow and England a republic in all but the name, *Relazioni di ambasciatori sabaudi, genovesi e veneti durante il periodo della grande alleanza e della successione di Spagna (1693–1713)*, ed. Carlo Morandi (Bologna, 1935), 163.

[9] The Italian text sounds thus: 'resta circoscritta e dipendente in certa tal qual forma da quella del Parlamento', Firpo, 'La relazione'. 'In certa tal qual forma' can be translated in two rather different ways, either as 'up to a certain extent' or as 'in a certain way'.

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the part of the monarch and by jealousy on the part of political parties; civil strife was thus a possible outcome.[10]

It is not surprising that parliamentary affairs were usually predominant in the weekly despatches sent by Italian agents to their courts. Despatches show a pattern of seasonality: when parliament was not in session, political activity seemed to stop, and diplomats were forced to resort to gossip or to wild guesses about its conduct when it would assemble again. Reporting about parliament took different forms and different levels of detail, depending both on the political circumstances and on the attitude of a specific diplomat. Many of them, such as the Tuscan secretary Vincenzo Pucci, or the Genoese secretary Domenico Maria Viceti, went for a constant scrutiny of what happened in Westminster. They offered facts on the discussion of the most important bills and motions as well as interpretations of their political significance; sometimes they gave the numerical result of crucial divisions, and occasionally they mentioned speakers in a debate or outlined the position they had taken. For some time, Pucci even included a sort of sketchy parliamentary journal, a by-the-day report of the business transacted in parliament. Usually, the attention was balanced evenly between the house of commons and the house of lords: the impression is that, if anything, despatches were more concerned with the house in which the court faced an uphill task.

Parliamentary acts that could be useful in order to understand the king and government's policy, or the attitude of the two houses, such as the speech from the throne and addresses of thanks, were frequently attached, either in the original or in a translation, to diplomatic correspondence. On the one hand, they evidently acted as a sort of barometer of the political weather; on the other, through them Italian governments had precious information on the agenda of the ministry as well as hints of the difficulties that they were facing. Similar acts, which were regularly dealt with in a despatch but only occasionally attached to it, were motions passed or rejected by each house, or protests transcribed in the journal of the house of lords. It was very unusual for the contents of a specific bill to form part of any attachment sent home, although there were a few exceptions.[11]

The attention to parliament, and the awareness of how easily the balance might change in either house, led Italian diplomats to a careful consideration of political parties. This mainly had the aim of weighing the strength of each party and assessing whether the court could implement its policy, but sometimes attention was also paid to the ideological background of both factions. Occasionally popular support for the different positions was discussed, although how correctly it could be assessed is open to question. Nevertheless, the representatives of the Italian states were usually quite sceptical about the good faith of politicians, and described transitions from Tories to Whigs (or vice versa) in terms of a struggle for power, money and honour. Actually, when they concluded that the ministry could widen its support in parliament, they often thought this could happen thanks to patronage. Lying under their description of political struggle is an idea of parliament as a formidable machine that creates the possibility of wielding great power, but that at the same time resembles a wheel of fortune. Successful politicians are pressed by those eager for office, but once the

[10]For a similar perspective, cf. ASTo, C/MPE/N/GB, 4/2, ff. 531–2, 541: de Trivié's despatches 7 Feb. and 6 June 1715 NS.

[11]The plan for a national lottery passed by parliament in 1712 and sent by Viceti to the senate of Genoa (ASGe, Archivio Segreto [hereafter cited as AS], 2279: despatch 25 Apr. 1712) is possibly the weirdest example. Did he expect senators to buy some tickets?

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latter are in charge, it is their turn to feel under siege. As cynically observed by the Venetian ambassador Nicolò Tron in 1716, there were simply not enough positions in the administration to satisfy everybody.[12] This condition of instability and possibly sudden change also led to a constant interest in the opposition. Generally speaking, in their letters diplomats showed their support for the incumbent administration, and at times politicians who stood against the court were ostensibly described in negative terms in official, not ciphered correspondence.[13] This of course might have been a matter of caution, since correspondence was at risk of being intercepted, but there was also an awareness that any desirable stability in the British political system was provided only by a long-lasting administration. Still, the most expert or brilliant agents of Italian states knew that neglecting members of parliament who sided against the government would be, in the long run, a serious mistake. They were aware that the overthrowing of an administration had to be expected in Britain, or that politicians forcefully opposing the ministry might later decide to join it.[14] They might be explicitly advised to do so by their master, as in the case of Victor Amadeus II.[15] Remarkably, there is also an evolution in the language used to describe the opposition. Sometimes a neutral tag is used, typically 'the party contrary/opposed [to the Court]'.[16] The most usual expression, however, is 'the Malcontents'. In time, most diplomats shifted to 'the oppositions', and later (normally in the second half of the century) to 'the opposition', at times with a capital O. This can also reflect a transition from a perception of opposing members of parliament as saboteurs of the policy carried out by the crown, to their acknowledgment as participants in a wider political game. Naturally, when – as often during the reigns of George I and II – the reversionary interest was a factor, there was a major inducement to keep a channel of communication open, since the prince of Wales 'one day will be the Master', as a Modenese diplomat wrote in 1737.[17]

Tactics on either side of the political divide are often openly discussed in diplomatic correspondence. Some are also aware of how parliamentary procedure can be used to achieve a political goal, for instance with the Commons' attempt, in King William's reign, to force unpalatable measures onto the Lords and the crown by 'tacking' them onto supply bills.[18] In 1712, the Venetian ambassador Pietro Grimani discussed in similar terms a possible prorogation after Queen Anne's creation of 12 peers, or the queen's decision to promise parliament a discussion on the articles of peace.[19] Viceti observed that the introduction of a bill in favour of the elector of Hanover and the passing of a motion on the negotiations of peace in the house of lords on 22 December 1711 were made possible by the cunning move of the Whigs, who had taken advantage of the fact that most Tories, supposing that the business

[12] ASVe, Senato, Dispacci degli ambasciatori e residenti (Inghilterra) [hereafter cited as S/DAR/I], 91, f. 168v: despatch 1 May 1716 NS.

[13] Some of them (notably the Savoyard representatives) usually wrote in cipher the parts of their despatches where political gossip took a more serious character.

[14] The Venetian ambassador Grimani wrote that many who were fighting the court actually longed to be won by it, ASVe, S/DAR/I, 87, f. 613: despatch 25 Dec. 1711 NS.

[15] ASTo, C/MPE/N/GB, 4/1 and 5/5–6.

[16] 'Il partito opposto' or 'il partito contrario'; 'to the Court' is usually implied, not written explicitly.

[17] 'un giorno poi sarà il Padrone', ASMo, Carteggio Ambasciatori (Inghilterra) [hereafter cited as CAI] 21: despatch 11 Oct. 1737 NS (Abbot Pareti's remark about Prince Frederick is in cipher).

[18] *Le relazioni*, ed. Barozzi and Berchet, 509.

[19] ASVe, S/DAR/I, 87, ff. 662, 680–1: despatches 22 Jan. and 5 Feb. 1712 NS.

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of the day was concluded, had left the House once the Occasional Conformity Bill had received the royal assent.[20] Conversely, in the following spring, the call of the House for members impatient to return to their homes was postponed until the administration could show parliament the result of the negotiations at Utrecht.[21] Every transformation in the composition of the houses of parliament was seen in the light of advantage for one faction. This was, unsurprisingly, the case in the creation of 12 peers by Queen Anne in 1712 in order to change power relations in the upper house, but the same view was adopted both for the Septennial Act in 1716 and the Peerage Bill in 1719.

As to the first act, it was explained by Italian diplomats as a trick of the Whigs, in order to avoid defeat in the forthcoming elections. Tron wrote that the ministry would stop at nothing in order to remain in office.[22] Pucci reported that the Tories realised it would be 'a deadly blow'. They also feared that the passing of such an act might lead, in seven years' time, to a further renewal of the sitting parliament, to be carried on repetitively as long as the crown and the majority in the house of commons would agree.[23] Italian diplomats, however, knew that the Whigs were taking a chance.[24] According to Pucci, the feelings of the nation were against the bill and parliament was going through it at breakneck speed in order to prevent the arrival of too many petitions from all over the country.[25] The decision to bring the bill into the house of lords, even though the outcome there was in doubt, was explained with tactical reasons.[26] Even if the bill should be rejected there, it would be less of a political reverse than a defeat in the upper house after it had been passed by the Commons. Besides, the Whigs were able to pretend that they were simply agreeing to something decided by the Lords and so, hopefully, annoy their constituents less.

The passing of the Septennial Act was considered a Whig triumph, the proposal of the Peerage Bill as a sort of plan B on their part, in order to secure a majority in the house of lords even after George II's accession to the throne. But diplomats were aware of the problems raised by the bill, both on the constitutional level (specifically, whether the provisions on Scottish peers violated the Act of Union) and on the parliamentary level, since the Commons were very reluctant to pass it.[27] That, Pucci observed, was why the Court Party, after having tried its best to manage enough members to pass it, at first decided to 'smother' the bill in the house of lords rather than risk defeat in the lower house.[28] It is significant that the decision to re-introduce the bill in late autumn 1719, after it had been abandoned before the summer recess, was read by some diplomats as evidence of the fact that now the

[20] *LJ*, xix, 351; ASGe, AS, 2279: despatch 28 Dec. 1711.

[21] ASGe, AS, 2279: despatches 2, 9 and 23 May 1712.

[22] ASVe, S/DAR/I, 91: despatches 3 and 17 Apr. 1716 NS.

[23] ASFi, MdP, 4222: despatches 6, 13 ('un colpo mortale') and 27 Apr. 1716 NS.

[24] De Trivié, though favourable to the measure, sarcastically remarked that the Whigs were thus repealing the Triennial Act they had forced on William III, ASTo, C/MPE/N/GB, 4/2, ff. 568–9: despatch 20 Apr. 1716 NS.

[25] ASFi, MdP, 4222: despatches 11 and 18 May 1716 NS.

[26] ASFi, MdP, 4222: despatch 27 Apr. 1716 NS.

[27] ASFi, MdP, 4223: despatch 13 Mar. 1719 NS; on the Scottish factor, cf. Clyve Jones, ' "Venice Preserv'd; or A Plot Discovered": The Political and Social Context of the Peerage Bill of 1719', in *A Pillar of the Constitution: The House of Lords in British Politics 1640–1784*, ed. Clyve Jones (1989), 87.

[28] 'ha stimato à proposito di soffogarlo nella Camera Alta ove ebbe origine', ASFi, MdP, 4223: despatches 10 and 24 Apr., 1 May 1719 NS.

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government was sure that it would pass.[29] At the time, Pucci had just arrived from Rotterdam, after a dreadful crossing that lasted seven days, with rough seas and contrary winds. One suspects he was still sick when he wrote to the grand duke of Tuscany, because his mistake was quite unusual in a man who displayed a good knowledge of English politics: 'everything will go as the Court wishes, both in these reigns, and abroad', and, as to the bill, 'those who wish for it and support it must have taken steps to secure its approval, as they would not present it again, were they not certain of success'.[30] As it turned out, the Commons sank the bill and Pucci tried to excuse his mistake in his following despatch. He mentioned that there had been a widespread sensation that the bill would pass, but above all, he underlined 'the uncertainty of those deliberations that depend on so many, and so different humours'.[31] Thus the outcome was basically blamed on the nature of parliament.

3. *Taming Parliament*

The fact that parliament was perceived as a formidable centre of power did not necessarily imply that it was beyond control. As a matter of fact, there was a growing consciousness among Italian diplomats of the possibility of something else at the heart of the political system of Britain, something able to rein in even the tumultuous assembly in Westminster. This alternative source of power was identified in a strong (premier) minister. At first only a minority of Italian agents shared this opinion, so convincing was their idea of parliament as potentially unmanageable, and so great was usually their shock at the clamour surrounding some elections. An exception was Benedetto Viale, envoy from the Republic of Genoa, who, writing just before the 1708 elections and forecasting a Whig victory, stated that this prospect, not relished by a queen whom he saw as more on the Tories' side, could really vanish in a day. If the queen changed her lord treasurer before parliament met, the new minister, provided he was clever enough, would easily win many members of parliament on the court's side and induce them to leave their party.[32] In this view, royal prerogative and patronage could control parliament. This idea was shared by a restricted number of diplomats and had greater chances to prevail when a strong figure was acting as chief minister, such as Robert Harley, later earl of Oxford. At other times, trusting someone with the skills to keep parliament under control might be harder, but still, it was worth trying. Victor Amadeus II suggested that his men in London should take special care in identifying who the actual premier minister was, bearing in mind that the real holder of the place might not depend on the prestige of the office he was holding in the counsels of the sovereign. If such a man existed, however, he was unquestionably 'the driving force of government'.[33]

[29] ASMo, CAI, 10: despatch 11 Dec. 1719 NS.

[30] 'Tutto anderà come vuol la Corte sì riguardo al di fuori, che al di dentro di questi regni. […] quei che lo bramano, ed appoggiano averanno prese le loro misure, e […] non lo riproporrebbero senza esser sicuri d'un buon evento', ASFi, MdP, 4223: despatch 11 Dec. 1719 NS.

[31] 'quanto siano incerte le deliberazioni che dependano dalla diversità, e pluralità di tanti umori' ASFi, MdP, 4223: despatch 27 Dec. 1719 NS.

[32] *Relazioni di ambasciatori*, ed. Morandi, 182.

[33] E.g. ASTo, C/MPE/N/GB, 4/1: Victor Amadeus II's instructions to Marquis de Trivié, 1713 ('il principal mobile del ministero').

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The quest for such a man was over in Walpole's time, and with the consolidation of the Robinocracy from the 1720s Italian diplomats seemed to take a more relaxed attitude. In their eyes, Sir Robert was the man who had tamed parliament, and consequently the endemic instability of the British polity was becoming less appalling.[34] Even Riva, who in his report to Rinaldo III, duke of Modena, painted the rather chaotic picture of the constitution quoted above, explained that the king of Great Britain was not a figurehead, a duke of Venice, since 'the clever and cunning ministers administer the two houses at their discretion'.[35] Supreme in this skill, according to him, was Walpole, whom he described as 'the oracle of England', master at court, in the house of commons, and in the nation as well, to the point that he 'will be minister and arbiter of Great Britain as long as he wants to'. Riva was really struck by the fact that when a year before the rumour had spread that Walpole was going to retire from politics, there had been a ten per cent loss in public funds.[36] Trust in Sir Robert's skills was a constant element of diplomatic reporting throughout his tenure of office. Still, it is noteworthy that not all diplomats who believed that Walpole was in control of parliament were aware of the fact that an important pillar of his predominance was his decision to remain a member of the house of commons and thus to keep in check, both through the force of sheer numbers and his talent in debate, the attempts of an opposition vocal in its criticism of the ministry. Some tend rather to focus on George II's support for his minister or on the strength of patronage, if not open corruption, as the source of Walpole's power. There is thus, sometimes, a blatant contradiction between the view of the prime minister as a supremely crafted politician and the idea of a power resting not on his talents, but on the royal resources on which he was able to draw.

Solid as the foundations of the Robinocracy were, it was forced to admit defeat in the Excise Crisis, which offers an outstanding example of how the representatives of Italian states had by that time taken for granted that Walpole would always manage parliament according to his aims. This is even more striking, since it is one of the few cases in which diplomats rid themselves of their London-centred perspective and paid attention to the great turmoil in the country; they wrote that petitioning had been carried on and towns were presenting addresses to the king or instructions to members of parliament.[37] Still, they continued to believe that the fate of the scheme would be decided in Westminster and that the ministry would never risk defeat there. At the time, the chargé d'affaires from the duchy of Modena was Giovanni Giacomo Zamboni. A man with a long experience of Britain, he was well aware of the opposition to the excise scheme and thought that passing the bill would not be worthwhile, the nation being so strongly prejudiced against it.[38] To his surprise, the bill was brought forward; he concluded that if that was the ministry's choice, there would possibly be a great uproar, but the excise would pass without the shadow of

[34] Contrariwise, even during the Walpolean era French diplomats perceived the British system as unstable: see, Jeremy Black, *Debating Foreign Policy in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Farnham, 2011), 49–50.

[35] 'gli avveduti, e scaltri ministri regolano a loro talento le due Camere', BEUMo, MS it. 678, f. 1v: 'Descrizione di Londra'.

[36] 'l'Oracolo d'Inghilterra […] questi sarà il ministro arbitro della G. Bretagna sino a che vorrà esserlo', BEUMo, MS it. 678, ff. 82–84: 'Relazione della corte britannica'. Cf. also ASFi, MdP, 4229: despatch 19 Feb. 1731 NS.

[37] ASFi, MdP, 4230: despatches 9, 16 and 23 Feb. 1733 NS; ASVe, S/DAR/I, 99: despatch 6 Apr. 1733.

[38] ASMo, CAI, 20: despatches 2 and 23 Jan., 20 Feb. 1733 NS.

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a doubt. Zamboni repeated this statement at least eight times, in his letters home.[39] His surprise when Walpole was forced to abandon the scheme is echoed in the despatches of his colleagues, but Zamboni went a step further and realised that it had been a victory of 'the people', rather than of the opposition.[40]

In spite of his setback in 1733, Walpole continued to be seen as the man in charge of the kingdom, with Zamboni describing him as basically *the* ministry.[41] Sometimes, such as in the despatches of another agent from Modena, Abbot Pareti, the praise is so openly bestowed on 'the most wise minister'[42] that one wonders whether the writer was contemplating the possibility that his letters would end in Walpole's hands. Consequently, his fall in 1742 was considered a serious moment of crisis. Despatches usually give a detailed account of the events in late 1741 and early 1742: the unsatisfactory outcome of the general election, the attempts on the part of the ministry to muster a working majority in the Commons and the fierce determination of the opposition, the failed attempts of the court to reach an agreement with the prince of Wales or the duke of Argyll or to buy off enough members,[43] and Walpole's confidence even when his majority grew thinner. Diplomats offered their interpretation of the reasons that weakened the administration. The representative of the Republic of Genoa, Giambattista Gastaldi, mentioned both the dismissal of Argyll in 1740 and a sort of overconfidence on Walpole's part, which had led to an insufficient employment of the king's money in the election.[44] The opposition had thus spied an opportunity and produced an enormous effort at the polls, while in Scotland Argyll's defection had meant the loss of 28 members on the government's side. At first, some thought that the prime minister, backed by the crown, would still get over the difficult situation, possibly taking advantage of the Christmas recess or of the support of the Independents. In the meantime, everything seemed deadlocked. The Sardinian envoy, Chevalier Osorio, wrote to his king that he could not follow his instructions: 'one does not know with whom one has to deal'.[45] With the passing of weeks, however, the sensation set in that what diplomats were witnessing was the showdown between two long-contending factions and that Walpole would fall. When at last this happened, the news was hailed as a real revolution and immediately Italian diplomats started worrying about the dreadful consequences this might have. Apocalyptic predictions seemed the order of the day. Gastaldi

[39] ASMo, CAI, 20: despatches 9 Jan., 13 and 20 Feb., 13, 20 and 27 March, 3 and 17 Apr. 1733 NS. Zamboni's adamantine belief was shared by the Venetian resident Giovanni Domenico Imberti, ASVe, S/DAR/I, 99: despatches 2 and 16 Mar., 6 Apr. 1733.

[40] 'o per dir meglio il Popolo', ASMo, CAI, 20: despatch 1 May 1733 NS.

[41] ASMo, CAI, 20: despatch 22 May 1733 NS.

[42] E.g. ASMo, CAI, 21: despatches 27 July ('questo saviissimo ministero') and 21 Sept. ('prudentissimo ministero') 1736 NS.

[43] The Genoese secretary Gastaldi wrote that £4,000 had been offered each and commented that many had not accepted, perhaps out of fear, perhaps because they hoped to gain more with a place in the new administration, ASGe, AS, 2285: despatch 1 Feb. 1742.

[44] ASGe, AS, 2285: despatch 18 Jan. 1742. However, Argyll's dismissal was not, according to Gastaldi, Walpole's fault: he had come too late to prevent the king's decision, stage-managed by Harrington and Newcastle. Cf. Eveline Cruickshanks, 'The Political Management of Sir Robert Walpole, 1720–42', in *Britain in the Age of Walpole*, ed. Jeremy Black (Basingstoke, 1984), 42: 'Walpole could have been saved had it not been for the obstinacy of George II'.

[45] 'On ne sçait avec qui traiter', ASTo, Corte, Materie politiche per rapporto all'estero, Lettere ministri (Gran Bretagna) [hereafter cited as C/MPE/LM/GB], 48: despatch 5 Feb. 1742 NS.

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drew a radical agenda for the parliament that had defeated Walpole: triennial parliaments, no more standing armies, ejection of placemen, 'in short, such measures will be taken, that Parliament will no longer be dependent upon the Court, but the Court upon Parliament'. Osorio had already described secret committees as 'the most absolute power in the constitution of this country' and written that an administration forced to follow the will of parliament 'would cause such confusion that everybody is afraid of the consequences, since it cannot be foreseen how far they will go, or when they will be stopped'.[46] Parliament unchained, no longer under the skilful management of a prime minister, was back as a sort of nightmarish creature, ready to thrive on chaos and confusion: 'new revolutions can be born every day'.[47] It would take some time before this image of parliament as an untamed entity and of the British polity as intrinsically unstable[48] disappeared. The flop of the secret committee the Commons had selected to inquire on Walpole's tenure of office was a first signal, but it was not until the outcome of the 1746 struggle between George II and his ministers that Italian diplomats came back to the idea that the ministry was the driving force in the British constitution – a force that, as a rule, was even able to keep parliament at bay.

4. *Sources of Information*

The sensation that in Britain everything might change so quickly proved a constant, nagging suspicion for Italian diplomats; their need to find reliable sources of information appears therefore all the more pressing. Obviously, each man sent to the court of St James's had to fend for himself and try to find which were the most useful sources upon which he could rely, but there are some recurring elements. A rather important factor seems to elude the historian: to what extent did these men have a good command of English? Evidence is, at best, patchy. Those who spent many years in London probably spoke English well, as can be inferred by the fact that sometimes they directly provided Italian translations of some texts.[49] In the case of Zamboni, who spent most of his life in England, his fluency in English is evident from his vast correspondence that survives in the Bodleian library.[50] Other cases are less clear-cut. Complaints about the fact that Sir Robert Walpole's knowledge of foreign languages was limited to a smattering of French, and that interactions with him implied the

[46]'Insomma si prenderanno misure tali, che il Parlamento non dipenderà più dalla Corte; ma la Corte dal Parlamento' ASGe, AS, 2285: despatch 22 Feb. 1742 (in his 25 Jan. 1742 despatch, Gastaldi had even evoked Charles I's fate). For Osorio's words ('il n'y a rien de plus absolu dans la constitution de ce Gouvernement', 'ce qui causeroit des confusions dont il n'y a personne qui n'en craigne ni les consequences, n'etant pas possible de prevoir jusqu'où elles pourroient aller, ni quand on pourroit les arreter') cf. ASTo, C/MPE/LM/GB, 48, despatches 5 and 12 Feb.1742 NS.

[47]ASGe, AS, 2285, despatches 15 and 22 Mar., 3 May ('da un giorno all'altro ponno nascere altre rivoluzioni') 1742.

[48]In Osorio's words: 'il est impossible de predire quel sera le succès de tant de brigues entre des gens si capricieux, et si extraordinaires', ASTo, C/MPE/LM/GB, 48: despatch 13 Apr. 1742 NS.

[49]Giraldi boasted that he opened a channel with Queen Anne's new favourite, Abigail Masham, thanks to his command of the language (and the recommendation of the duchess of Shrewsbury), ASFi, MdP, 4234: Giraldi to Duke Cosimo III, 17 Apr. 1711 NS.

[50]Bodl., MS Rawl., letters 116–38. I am very grateful to Robin Eagles, who directed me to the treasure trove of Zamboni's papers.

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assistance of members of his staff, hint at the fact that some diplomats were not able to address the great man in English.[51]

A common feature is the variety of sources Italian diplomats used in their correspondence home. The fact that they were serving their masters in a bustling town was very helpful: one was surrounded by different sources of information, both public and confidential. First of all, the post played quite an important role. In the despatches sent by diplomats, London appears as the centre where news from different parts of continental Europe were collected, and from where the acquired information was spread to Italy. However, it is not easy to understand exactly which was the source of the news, as official correspondence was usually vague about that. Reading between the lines, one sometimes understands that the ultimate source was a newsletter or a gazette. At other times, it appears that information came from the net of diplomatic correspondence, with envoys in other European towns reporting about the most important events (or simply rumours) in their place of residence. In spite of possible rivalry, news circulated also among foreign ministers in London. After all, they spent tense hours together in the waiting rooms of the mighty, and shared official or friendly meals. Some Italian diplomats seemed to meet rather frequently, but it was possible to develop a confidential relation also with agents coming from north of the Alps: apparently one of the Imperial ministers was ready to show the drafts of his despatches to the resident of the Duchy of Modena.[52]

Although news from outside Britain played an important part in diplomatic correspondence, it was intelligence about the British court and political world that constituted the most prized knowledge an envoy to London could acquire. It was also – they felt – the most difficult one, in light of the ever-changing character of the political landscape. Once more, diplomats relied on a variety of sources. Newspaper accounts were mentioned in despatches, usually to confirm news, and even press clippings were sent to Italy. Regrettably, these attachments have often disappeared from archives. During the first decades of the century, it is also quite difficult to identify exactly which newspapers diplomats were referring to, even though the *London Gazette* is sometimes cited. This changed in the late 1720s and early 1730s, at the time of the struggle of opposition newspapers against Sir Robert Walpole: *The Craftsman* came then to be mentioned in diplomatic correspondence, and even caricatures against 'the prime and sole minister' were alluded to.[53]

Alongside newspapers, newsletters were a valuable source of information, although the details about them prove elusive. Newsletters (sometimes in French) played a vital role, especially when it came to one of the key elements in the reports to Italy: the activity of parliament. Newsletters were sometimes explicitly used as the source of knowledge on this subject;[54] on the other hand, our sources reveal that diplomats from time to time attended parliamentary sittings, even bringing their own guests. On the whole, they seemed well

[51] BEUMo, MS it. 678, f. 84: 'Relazione della corte britannica'.

[52] ASMo, CAI, 10: despatch 17 Feb. 1719 NS.

[53] Branding the most influential member of the administration as prime and/or sole minister had been a traditional opposition tactic at least since Oxford's times. Walpole was particularly open to this kind of accusation, which was frequently echoed in the pages of *The Craftsman*. For a few examples, cf. A.F. Robbins, 'Prime Minister', *Notes and Queries* (8th ser., xi, 1897), 69–73.

[54] If no political commentary was needed, Zamboni sometimes simply referred his readers to the French newsletter on parliamentary business he attached to his despatches.

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informed on what was going on in Westminster. A case study offers valuable insights into the sources on parliamentary activity. If the papers that were once attached to despatches usually have not survived, the correspondence of Vincenzo Pucci is a notable exception. When Pucci sent parliamentary acts such as the king's speech, the addresses of thanks and the reply of the sovereign, they came in the original English text, usually in an official publication, together (always for the king's speech) with a translation, which could be either in Italian or French. The first case is self-explanatory: Pucci translated the text himself (or had it translated) in the same language he used in his correspondence with his superiors. But why in French? One suspects that sometimes, to spare time, he used a translation that was already available in London, where there was a market for French translations of these sorts of documents. This impression is strengthened by the evolution of the reports on parliamentary activity in Pucci's correspondence. When parliament was in session, he wrote, in a separate sheet, what is called 'a diary' on the activity of both houses. At first this account had been in Italian, and in Pucci's hand. At a later date, however, he attached a very similar document but in French, and written by another hand: this does look like a newsletter specifically dedicated to parliament, and probably a similar source can be claimed for the French translations of the documents mentioned above.[55] A specific entry for 'divisions, and other parliamentary papers' appears constantly in the accounts Pucci sent to Florence. His correspondence shows examples of further interesting material. In 1730, many despatches lingered on British foreign policy, and the attacks on Walpole over the Treaty of Seville. Pucci sent to Florence no fewer than five pamphlets on this topic, as well as copies of two issues of the opposition newspaper *The Craftsman*, containing articles condemning the government's foreign policy; he observed that, even though he dismissed the newspaper as 'Pulteney's outbursts', it was a vain attempt to discredit the ministry.[56]

Naturally an insider would have been the best possible source of information, but unfortunately diplomats were seldom explicit in their correspondence about how and from whom they got the information they sent home. This has also something to do with the nature of the historical sources that have survived. Diplomatic reporting was in fact based on two different genres: the weekly despatches sent by diplomatic agents to their princes, and the *Relazione finale* (final report), which ambassadors mostly presented at the end of their mission. While despatches usually still form an identified – and often catalogued – archival series in the 'Court', 'Senate' or 'Secret' archive of the pre-unification Italian states, finding a final report is quite a different matter, and only a few of them have emerged so far. The problem is that, whereas the final report was presented or discussed when the ambassador had come back, and with all guarantees of secrecy, a weekly despatch was in danger of being intercepted, and thus writing down one's source of information was usually avoided. Rather vague phrases such as 'a friend', or 'someone in the know' or 'a person of quality' were usually preferred. There are some exceptions though, and in the ciphered parts of

[55]It is interesting that the plan of the 1712 lottery Viceti sent to Genoa (cf. above, note 11) had likewise been printed in French: 'A Londres, de l'imprimerie de Jean Barber, dans la rue de Lambeth-Hill, 1712'. However, according to Paul Mantoux, *Notes sur les comptes rendus des séances du parlement Anglais au XVIIIe siècle conservés aux archives du Ministère des Affaires Etrangères* (Paris, 1906), 63–6, *précis des débats* were added to the correspondence of French diplomats only from the 1730s.

[56]E.g. 'parte, e sfogo principalmente di Pulteney avversario dichiarato del Cavaliere Walpole', ASFi, MdP, 4229: despatch 18 Dec. 1730 NS.

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despatches, reserve could be dropped. Sometimes one was forced to do so: in 1719, Riva pressed his duke for extraordinary funds in order to pay the intelligence he acquired from Sir Luke Schaub, presented as 'Mr Scob, […] a man who is in the secret of everything'.[57] Tight-fisted as Italian princes seemed to be when it came to providing money for their agents abroad, it was evidently necessary to be quite explicit in order to be granted more, even for such a vital aim.

If sometimes second-string members of the administration could be managed, acquiring knowledge from ministers was a more difficult task. First of all, getting their attention might not be easy. To their surprise, diplomats perceived another peculiarity of the English government: the predominance of domestic rather than foreign policy. Except when a great crisis was looming or taking place, foreign policy was not appealing, and when the administration was under attack over domestic reasons, diplomats candidly wrote that ministers were better left alone. In any case, they simply did not have any time to spare for foreign envoys. Circumstances were worse during parliamentary recess, when in London there seemed to be basically nothing to do for members of the cabinet, with the result that they disappeared into the country, beyond the reach of all but the most stubborn and ingenious foreign agents. When at last it was possible to get a minister's ear, diplomats had to be cautious: they were aware of the differences inside the ministry, and of the possibility of being enlisted in the support of one of the factions that were fighting for supremacy in the administration. Italian residents did not limit themselves to the minister who was in charge of their area (i.e., the southern secretary), but they tried to be in touch with many at a time. Gaining the confidence of the chief minister would have been the ultimate prize, but it was extremely difficult. A remarkable exception is the *Relazione Finale* of the envoy extraordinary of the duke of Savoy to England, Pierre de Mellarède, in 1713. The report deals at length with what Oxford had told Mellarède at their meetings. This is valuable in itself, but a further statement is even more telling: the lord treasurer mentioned a Savoyard diplomat who had previously served in London, Count Maffei, as the only foreign minister who had not conspired to topple the ministry. In return, Oxford had taken Maffei into his confidence and told him everything he needed to know to serve his master, while other diplomats were left in the dark: 'While the others knew only what they read in the Gazettes'.[58] One wonders whether Oxford's original words and meaning were specific (the *London Gazette*) or more generic ('gazettes' as a synonym for newsletters or newspapers). The fact that Mellarède's final report contains insights into the thorniest issues of the time, including the possibility of a Jacobite succession and the existence of a will of Queen Anne in which she acknowledged the rights of the Pretender, makes one wonder if he received this sort of intelligence from the same source that had served his predecessor so well.

British ministers usually tended to be close-mouthed. This was not true, as a rule, for the Hanoverians, and to them diplomats appealed when they wanted information. Members of the Hanoverian entourage were often playing a different game than the one played by the

[57] ASMo, CAI, 10: despatches 5 and 20 Jan. ('quest'uomo ch'è nel segreto di tutto') 1719 NS. Schaub was private secretary to Lord Stanhope. A ciphered remark in Riva's 28 Apr. 1719 NS despatch styles him as 'our Scob' ('il nostro Scob').

[58] 'pendant que les autres ne sçavoient que ce qu'ils lisoient dans les Gazettes', Domenico Carutti, '*Relazione sulla corte d'Inghilterra del consigliere di Stato Pietro Mellarède*', *Miscellanea di storia italiana*, xxiv (1885), 235–6.

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administration, and so they could be open to interaction with foreign diplomats. Moreover, they were always keen on foreign policy, which was at times neglected by their British counterparts. Gaining their confidence was therefore worthwhile, and so it does not come as a surprise that among the sources quoted in despatches appear the names of the likes of Bernstorff and Bothmer:[59] even if Hanoverian statesmen did not betray secrets, they seemed to be more available than British ones when a foreign envoy sought an interview. At a later date, when the influence of Hanoverian ministers vanished, diplomats could try the same move with the English politicians who chose to uphold George II's Hanoverian interest.

There are two further sources of information that at least some Italian diplomats were ready to use. One was the opposition: for the reasons explained above, cultivating the friendship of members of the opposition was a sort of insurance policy. It was also useful to gain knowledge, and sometimes one is tempted to guess that members of the opposition were hidden behind the anonymous 'friends' who were acknowledged in the despatches as the source of juicy political gossip, or of behind-the-scenes details about negotiations on a reshuffle in the ministry or on parliamentary activity.[60] Another source is public opinion. The regard shown by Italian diplomats to the feelings of the people is, in a way, surprising. Was it possibly because of their perception of the British constitution as constantly on the brink of collapsing into dangerous democracy? This aside, a view of the general feeling of the nation is mentioned in diplomatic correspondence when both foreign and domestic policy issues are under discussion. It is difficult to tell on what the judgment was founded. Of course, they might have read newsletters or the press, but often one is under the impression that they based their sensations mainly on what happened in London, and that the behaviour of London crowds mattered a great deal in their judgment of the situation. Yet there are exceptions, such as in the case of the Excise Crisis, when it appears that foreign ministers secured newsletters in order to be informed of what was happening throughout the kingdom.

A final remark can be made on the occasions when the sources of information used by Italian diplomats did not prove reliable. They seldom simply believed 'fake news', but sometimes too strong a dependence on a specific kind of source led to failure. The fact that this happened especially when the ministry eventually met with a disappointment is telling; possibly some diplomats relied too much on their sources in the administration. The rejection of the Peerage Bill and the withdrawal of the Excise Scheme, two of the bitterest defeats suffered by the court and ministry in the early 18th century, coincided with drastically wrong forecasts on the part of some of the veterans of the Italian diplomatic corps in London. Perhaps this shows that a faith in the ability on the part of the ministers to control even parliament sometimes led to excessive dependence on their word. Alternatively, it confirms that, in spite of the many sources they used, Italian diplomats were still at risk of ending up puzzled by all the forces at work in the British polity.

[59]E.g. ASFi, MdP, 4223: 'Minuta' 28 Jan. 1718 NS; ASMo, CAI, 10: despatches 3 Nov. and 22 Dec. 1719 NS.

[60]In 1727–8, Zamboni, who however at the time was not serving an Italian prince, but Ludwig IV, landgrave of Hesse-Darmstadt, even intrigued with Pulteney, among Walpole's fiercest opponents, to put his hands, or at least his eyes, on a copy of the 1721 treaty between Britain and Spain, Bodl., MS Rawl., letters 119, ff. 200–1 and letters 123, f. 467.

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Appendix: Giuseppe Riva and Samuel Pufendorf's *De Statu Imperii Germanici*[61]

As mentioned above, one of the most striking examples of an Italian diplomat's mystified judgment on the British political system, namely the one included in the final report of the Modenese Giuseppe Riva, was couched in a language reminiscent of Samuel Pufendorf's analysis of the Holy Roman Empire in his *De Statu Imperii Germanici*. If – as it is very plausible – this is not a coincidence, it seems more probable that Riva had come across the text of the Saxon philosopher in London rather than in Italy. *De Statu* was enormously successful, with 18 Latin editions before 1734, printed in 30,000 – or perhaps even 300,000 – copies.[62] None had seen the light in Italy, since the typographical data of the 1667–8 Veronese edition of *De Statu* are almost certainly spurious.[63] Actually, no other book published by the alleged printer, Franciscus Giulius, is recorded in the central catalogue of Italian libraries.[64] In contrast, most of Pufendorf's works had been enjoying a long fortune in Britain. *De Jure Naturae* had been favourably discussed (and quoted at length) by James Tyrrell in 1681;[65] the same work had been recommended by John Locke in the first edition of *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*,[66] to which *De Officio Hominis et Civis* was added in 'The third edition enlarged'.[67] By the time Riva was living in England, and even more so by the time he wrote his final report, literally dozens of editions and translations of the Saxon jurist had been published in Britain.[68] As far as *De Statu* is concerned, Edmund Bohun published two editions of his translation (and slight adaptation) of Pufendorf's pamphlet, in 1690 (but the name of the translator was kept anonymous) and in 1696. It has been argued that they must have been especially popular among the diplomats at the court of St James's.[69] Even as a Catholic, Riva would not have been prevented from reading most of Pufendorf's works by their inclusion in the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*. It is true that the

[61] I am very grateful to Michael Schaich for calling my attention to Pufendorf's text and to Bernardo Pieri who introduced me to the reception of the Saxon philosopher in 18th-century Italy.

[62] Cf. Samuel Pufendorf, *The Present State of Germany; Translated by Edmund Bohun, 1696*, ed. M.J. Seidler (Indianapolis, 2007), xiii, note 10.

[63] Andreas Osiander, 'Irregulare aliquod corpus et monstro simile: Can Historical Comparisons Help Understand the European Union?' (Aug. 28, 2010), 6, note 13, available at SSRN: http://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1648807 (accessed 5 Dec. 2020).

[64] https://opac.sbn.it/ (accessed 13 Jan. 2021).

[65] James Tyrrell, *Patriarcha non Monarcha: The Patriarch Unmonarch'd. Being Observations on a Late Treatise and Divers Other Miscellanies, Published under The Name of Sir Robert Filmer, Baronet: in Which The Falseness of Those Opinions That Would Make Monarchy* Jure Divino *Are Laid Open, and the True Principles of Government and Property (Especially in our Kingdom) Asserted. By a Lover of Truth and of His Country* (1681), 236–9.

[66] John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693), 221 [§ 175].

[67] (1695), 322 [§ 186]. On Locke's admiration for Pufendorf see also M.P. Thompson, 'Significant Silences in Locke's Two Treatises of Government: Constitutional History, Contract and Law', *The Historical Journal*, xxxi (1988), 275–94 and Colin Heydt, *Moral Philosophy in Eighteenth-Century Britain: God, Self and Other* (Cambridge, 2018), 5–6.

[68] Cf. Klaus Luig, 'Zur Verbreitung des Naturrechts in Europa', *Tijdschrift voor Rechtsgeschiedenis / Revue d'Histoire du Droit / The Legal History Review*, xl (1972), 539–57; David Saunders and Ian Hunter, 'Bringing the State to England: Andrew Tooke's Translation of Samuel Pufendorf's De officio Hominis et Civis', *History of Political Thought*, xxiv (2003), 218; Guglielmo Sanna, 'La fortuna di Pufendorf in Inghilterra: il contributo del clero anglicano nella prima metà del Settecento', *Rivista Storica Italiana*, cxviii (2006), 82–3; Michael Seidler, 'Pufendorf's Moral and Political Philosophy', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. E.N. Zalta, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2018/entries/pufendorf-moral/ (accessed 12 Dec. 2020).

[69] Heinz Duchhardt, 'Pufendorf in England: Eine unbekannte Übersetzung von Pufendorfs Reichsverfassungsschrift aus dem Jahre 1690', *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte*, lxxii (1990), 152.

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Einleitung zu der Historie der vornehmsten Reiche und Staaten was put on the list in 1693, but it was followed only in 1714 by *De Jure Naturae*, while his other works had to wait much longer, until 1754 for the book of our interest, *De Statu*.[70]

The situation was completely different in Italy. Historians have highlighted the delay of the first appearance of Italian editions of Grotius's and Pufendorf's works, with the first adaptations of *De Officio Hominis et Civis* coming out no earlier than 1746, while the first translation, Giambattista Almici's version of *De Jure Naturae* (heavily indebted to Jean Barbeyrac's French edition), started appearing in Venice in 1757.[71] Even if educated persons like Riva could read the Latin originals, such a delay speaks volumes about the absence of a discussion on Pufendorf in early 18th-century Italy. Besides, to my knowledge no Latin edition of the works of the Saxon jurist had been printed in Italy at the time. Pufendorf appears more frequently in the private correspondence and libraries of Italian intellectuals.[72] Alongside the Neapolitan philosopher Giambattista Vico, Ludovico Antonio Muratori is often credited with circulating Pufendorf's ideas in Italian culture and in a letter to Canon Agostino Pantò he celebrated the Saxon thinker among a very restricted number of representatives of the modern school of natural law ('great men, who won rare praise').[73] Still, it took many years before Pufendorf's texts were publicly discussed. It can be argued that Muratori is a possible channel of Riva's familiarity with the Saxon philosopher: they were both from Modena and had been in constant correspondence since 1715 at the latest; moreover, their letters were rather frequent, the tone constantly warm and books a recurrent topic. It is nonetheless true that, while Muratori harshly criticises Thomas Hobbes,[74] I could not trace any reference to Pufendorf in his letters to Riva (at least up to the time of the diplomat's final report).[75] Pufendorf is not mentioned in Muratori's correspondence with Riva's friend and successor Giovanni Giacomo Zamboni, either.[76]

Naturally, in the light of the pamphlet war that had followed the appearance of *De Statu*, the Italian diplomat might have discovered that book during the short stays in Vienna that punctuated the first years of his career. Nonetheless, Riva's choice of words, especially

[70] Cf. Franz Heinrich Reusch, *Der Index der verbotenen Bücher: Ein Beitrag zur Kirchen- und Literaturgeschichte* (2 vols, Bonn, 1883–5), ii/1, 173, who cites *De Statu* as one of the most striking examples of a work that reached the list of prohibited books inexplicably late (Reusch, *Der Index*, ii/1, 168).

[71] Luig, 'Zur Verbreitung', 543, 555–6; Diego Panizza, 'La traduzione italiana del "De Iure Naturae" di Pufendorf: giusnaturalismo moderno e cultura cattolica nel Settecento', *Studi Veneziani*, xi (1969), 483–528; Maurizio Bazzoli, 'Giambattista Almici e la diffusione di Pufendorf nel Settecento italiano', *Critica storica*, xvi (1979), 3–100.

[72] Cf. Bazzoli, 'Giambattista Almici', 51; Emanuele Salerno, 'Giusnaturalismo e discussione politica nella Toscana della prima metà del Settecento: Neutralità, indipendenza e governo giusto da Sutter a Buondelmonti (1703–1755)', University of Pisa PhD, 2012, 22–3, 29, 36–9, https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/14704128.pdf (accessed 12 Dec. 2020).

[73] Bazzoli, 'Giambattista Almici', 51–4; for the quotation, cf. BEUMo, AM, 47/33A, f. 1: Muratori to Pantò, 10 July 1722 NS ('vi hanno atteso grandi uomini, con rara lor lode').

[74] BEUMo, AM, 48/23*bis*, f. 45v and f. 47: Muratori to Riva, 1 Apr. and 24 Dec. 1728 NS.

[75] Muratori's letters to Riva can be found in BEUMo, AM, 48/23*bis* or published in *Epistolario di L. A. Muratori*, ed. Matteo Càmpori, (15 vols, Modena, 1901–22), v–vii, and Ercole Sola, 'Curiosità storico-artistiche-letterarie tratte dal carteggio dell'inviato estense Giuseppe Riva con Lodovico Antonio Muratori: Con giunte e note illustrative', *Atti e memorie della R. Deputazione di storia patria per le provincie modenesi e parmensi* (3rd ser., iv, 1886), 197–392. Checking Riva's inedited letters to Muratori (with the exception of those in BEUMo, AM, 82/58 and 83/63, the only available in digital form) was prevented by the COVID-19 pandemic.

[76] *Edizione nazionale del carteggio di L.A. Muratori* (24 vols so far, Firenze, 1975–), xlvi, *Carteggi con Zacagni … Zurlini*, ed. Anna Burlini Calapaj (Firenze, 1975), 42–104.

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his 'una mostruosità non deforme', seems an allusion to Bohun's translation of another passage in Pufendorf's text, 'all kinds of mixture can produce nothing at last but a monstrous deformed Government',[77] rather than to the original Latin version, 'qualiscunque mixtura non nisi monstrum aliquod civitatis producere apta sit'.[78] If this is correct, there is some irony in the fact that Riva, a subject of a prince who acknowledged the suzerainty of the emperor, ended up finding the key to his interpretation of the British political system in the English translation of a work by a Saxon philosopher offering one of the most controversial views of the Holy Roman Empire.

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[77] *The Present State of Germany*, ed. Bohun, 150.

[78] Pufendorf, *De Statu*, 154–5 [ch. IV, § 8]. Seidler observes that 'some monster of a state' would have been a more correct translation, *The Present State of Germany*, ed. Seidler, 173, note *e*.

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